



The impact of gender on spouse preference in university students

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the impact gender has on the spouse preferences of university students. Designed as descriptive and cross-sectional, the study involved a population of 2383 senior-level students at a state university. As the study was planned to include all students from the said year-level at the university, no sample group was selected for the study. The study ended up being completed with a total of 1491 students. Data were evaluated using the chi square test and the independent samples t-test. Results from the study found that in terms of spouse selection criteria, a good personality (94.9%) and a high educational level (56.6%) were more important to female students than they were to male students ($p < 0.05$). On the other hand, having a high income (20%) and a good job (22.8%) were shown to be less important to male students than they were to female students ($p < 0.05$). Sharing a similar religious identity with their spouses was more significant for male students than it was for female students ($p < 0.05$). Of the female students, 71.6% reported that they wanted to have a flirting period with their spouses before marriage, while of the male students, only 61.2% wanted the same ($p < 0.001$). Overall, female students considered income level and personality to be important criteria for spouse selection, while their male counterparts considered sharing a similar religious identity with their spouse to be more important. The differences in spouse selection criteria between female and male students were determined to be a consequence of the students' understanding of gender norms.

Keywords: Gender, student, spouse selection

Introduction

From the very earliest stages of life to the day we die, situations fraught with multiple possibilities require us to enter into a decision-making process. The insignificant nature of many of these decisions taken throughout life results in the development of an automatic response system. Occasionally however, extremely important decisions need to be made to reach determined goals in life. Two of the more critical decisions that eventually emerge in life and that can have a major impact on the course of life are those related to one's profession and to one's selection of a spouse. The latter involves potentially serious negative or positive consequences, given that marriage can span more than half or even two-thirds of a person's life. Beyond being important, spouse selection is also a challenging and complex process. As part of the decision, individuals not only determine with whom they would be spending the remaining part of their lives, but also how this decision would improve or change them, what kind of a life they would lead and even raise the question of the type of person with whom they would have children and how they would raise them [1,2].

Spouse selection preferences vary according to societies as a result of cultural differences. Studies on this subject reveal that many factors affect spouse selection, including gender, age, ethnicity, location, physical appearance, similarity in attitudes and opinions, manners of communication, personality traits, wealth, virginity and religious beliefs [1,3-5]. Previous studies have also shown that gender plays an important role in how spouse selections are made [6].

The university years unquestionably qualify as a critical period of time for making important decisions. It is during this period that professions are chosen and individuals begin to scout out potential marriage spouses. During university life, young people are given a variety of opportunities and possibilities to meet their prospective spouses. Young adulthood, by nature, is a period during which romantic relationships and long-term partnerships come into prominence. It is also the ideal period for cultivating healthy relationship behaviors and for initiating the process of spouse selection [2, 7]. For the young people who dream of one day marrying, they have the opportunity of selecting someone who matches their desired criteria from within the circle of friends and acquaintances constituting their social life. In order to make a successful spouse selection, it is important that expectations be based on a solid understanding of the aims of marriage and that proper decisions are made about whether or not these expectations are realistic. This study was conducted to

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determine the impact gender has on the spouse selection preferences of university students.

Materials and Methods

Conducted using a descriptive, cross-sectional design, the study involved a population of 2383 senior-level students at a state university. As it was planned to include all students from the said year-level at the university, no sample group was selected for the study. The study ended up being completed with a total of 1491 students from the population.

The inclusion criteria included being a senior-level student who was actively in the process of pursuing their degree. Senior-level students in particular were selected as the participants in this study for the purpose of evaluating the spouse selection perception that occurs in students at the end of their education and training period. From the student population, 52 were excluded from the study for not completely filling in the form and 60 were excluded due to their refusal to participate in the study. Of the study population, 63% were able to be reached.

The study data were collected from the senior-level students between February and March, 2010 using a Participant Information Form that the researchers had developed on the basis of the relevant literature. A pilot study was conducted on 20 students to evaluate the understandability of the form. The data collection form was filled out by the students themselves at the end of the vocational classes to ensure they were provided with a quiet environment and had adequate time, as well as to secure a higher participation rate.

Participant Information Form: This form consists of questions on students' sociodemographic characteristics (e.g. gender, economic condition, family type, education level of mother and father) and on their opinions about spouse selection (e.g. required qualifications in spouse selection, ideal marriage age, preferred marriage type and the person who would ultimately decide on to whom they will get married).

The data obtained from the survey form were evaluated using the Statistical Program for Social Science (SPSS 13.0 for Windows) software package. The survey data were converted to digital form to enable them to be analyzed in the program. After determining the percentage and frequency distributions of the data, a chi-square test and t-test were performed on these data.

Before beginning the study, written permission was first obtained from the institution where the study would be conducted. The students were informed about the study

and given assurance that their personal information would be confidentially secured, and furthermore, it was explained to them that at any time during the course of the study they could withdraw if they so wished and that participation was on a voluntary basis.

Findings

Table 1 shows the distribution of the university students' sociodemographic characteristics by gender. The study found that the mean age of the female students (22.76 ± 1.85) was lower than that of the male students (23.48 ± 1.83) ($p < 0.05$), and that there were no significant differences in terms of the distributions of the students' economic conditions according to gender ($p > 0.05$). Of the female students, 88.6% were part of a nuclear family, while this percentage was found to be 81.1% in the male students ($p < 0.001$). Further, it was determined that 24.8% of the female students' mothers and 12.8% of the male students' mothers had completed high school or above. The difference between these percentages was found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Similarly, 52.5% of the female students' fathers had completed high school or above, while for the fathers of the male students, it was 32.5% ($p < 0.05$) (Table 1).

Table 2 shows the distribution of the students' required qualifications in spouse selection by gender. The percentage of the female students (94.9%) who reported 'having a good personality' as a required qualification in spouse selection was higher than that of males (89.7%), with the difference between the rates found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). To continue, 56.6% of the female students reported 'having a good education level' as a required qualification, while the percentage for this qualification was found to be 43.4% in the male students ($p < 0.001$).

The percentage of the male students who favorably viewed 'a good income' (20%) and 'profession' (22.8%) in spouse selection was lower than the rate of the female students who were alternatively shown to favor 'a good income' (49.7%) and 'profession' (54.9%) in spouse selection. The difference between the percentages was determined to be statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

In the study, 48.1% of the male students and 25.1% of the female students preferred that they and their prospective spouse belong to a similar sect. The difference between the genders on this variable was found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). The study did not find a statistically significant relationship between 'having a good physical appearance and strong health' and gender in spouse selection ($p > 0.05$) (Table 2).

Table 1. Distributions of students' sociodemographic characteristics by gender (N:1491)

Sociodemographic Characteristics	Female	Male	Total	Statistical significance
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	
Age	22.76 ± 1.85	23.48 ± 1.83	23.11 ± 1.92	p: 0.001 t: 7.566
Economic Level				
Low	389 (50.5)	394 (54.7)	783 (52.5)	p: 0.226 X ² : 2.971
Middle	342 (44.4)	288 (40.0)	630 (42.3)	
High	40 (5.2)	38 (5.3)	78 (5.2)	
Family Type				
Nuclear Family	677 (88.6)	582 (81.1)	1259 (85.0)	p: 0.001 X ² : 16.523
Extended Family	87 (11.4)	136 (18.9)	223 (15.0)	
Mother's Education Level				
Illiterate	84 (10.9)	208 (28.9)	292 (19.6)	p: 0.001 X ² : 92.558
Literate/Primary School Graduate	411 (53.3)	356 (49.4)	767 (51.4)	
Junior High School	85 (11.0)	64 (8.9)	149 (10.0)	
High School/Above	191 (24.8)	92 (12.8)	283 (19.0)	
Father's Education Level				
Illiterate	13 (1.7)	33 (4.6)	46 (3.1)	p: 0.001 X ² : 81.844
Literate/Primary School Graduate	213 (27.6)	335 (46.5)	548 (36.8)	
Junior High School	140 (18.2)	118 (16.4)	258 (17.2)	
High School/Above	405 (52.5)	236 (32.5)	639 (42.9)	
Total	771 (51.7%)	720 (48.3%)	1491 (100.0)	

Table 2. Distribution of students' required qualifications in spouse selection by gender.

Required Qualifications in Spouse Selection	Female	Male	Total	Statistical significance
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	
A Good Personality				
Yes	732 (94.9)	646 (89.7)	1378 (92.4)	p: 0.001 X ² : 14.480
No	39 (5.1)	74 (10.3)	113 (7.6)	
A Good Education Level				
Yes	595 (56.6)	457 (43.4)	1052 (70.6)	p: 0.001 X ² : 33.639
No	176 (40.1)	263 (59.9)	439 (29.4)	
A Good Income				
Yes	383 (49.7)	144 (20.0)	527 (35.3)	p: 0.001 X ² : 14.035
No	388 (50.3)	576 (80.0)	964 (64.7)	
A Good Profession				
Yes	423 (54.9)	164 (22.8)	587 (39.4)	p: 0.001 X ² : 16.06
No	348 (45.1)	556 (77.2)	904 (60.6)	
Belonging to a Similar Sect				
Yes	190 (25.1)	339 (48.1)	529 (36.2)	p: 0.001 X ² : 83.732
No	401 (53.0)	264 (37.4)	665 (45.5)	
Undecided	166 (21.9)	102 (14.5)	268 (18.3)	
A Good Physical Appearance				
Yes	364 (47.2)	341 (47.4)	705 (47.3)	p: 0.954 X ² : 0.003
No	407 (52.8)	379 (52.6)	786 (52.7)	
Strong Health				
Yes	424 (55.0)	362 (50.3)	786 (52.7)	p: 0.068 X ² : 3.322
No	347 (45.0)	358 (49.7)	705 (47.3)	

Table 3 shows the distribution of students' opinions about their preferred marriage type by gender. In the study, 71.6% of the female students and 61.2% of the male students reported that they wanted to first go through a flirting period before getting married. Moreover, the male students (26.8%) were more indecisive about the preferred marriage type than the female students (18.5%) (p<0.001).

There was no statistically significant relationship found between 'the person who would ultimately decide on to whom one got married' and gender (p>0.05). The ideal marriage age was found to be 26.22 ± 2.39 for the female students and 26.28 ± 4.14 for the male students, with the difference between the percentages determined to be not statistically significant (p>0.05) (Table 3).

Table 3. Distribution of Students' Opinions about Their Preferred Marriage Type by Gender (N:1491)

Opinions About Marriage Type	Female	Male	Total	Statistical significance
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	
Preferred Marriage Type				
After a flirting period	552 (71.6)	441 (61.2)	993 (66.0)	p: 0.001 X ² : 20.773
Arranged marriage	33 (4.3)	47 (6.5)	80 (5.4)	
Someone approved by my family	43 (5.6)	39 (5.4)	82 (5.5)	
Undecided	143 (18.5)	193 (26.8)	336 (22.5)	
The Person Who Will Decide on to Whom to Get Married				
Myself				
Yes	476 (61.7)	450 (62.5)	926 (62.1)	p: 0.762
No	295 (38.3)	270 (37.5)	565 (37.9)	X ² : 0.092
My friend				
Yes	291 (37.7)	257 (35.7)	548 (36.8)	p: 0.412
No	480 (52.3)	463 (54.3)	943 (63.2)	X ² : 0.672
My family				
Yes	51 (6.6)	42 (5.8)	93 (6.2)	p: 0.533
No	720 (93.4)	678 (94.2)	1398 (93.8)	X ² : 0.389
Ideal Marriage Age	Mean (SD) 26.22±2.39	Mean (SD) 26.28 ± 4.14	Mean (SD) 26.25±3.35	p: 0.772 t: 0.290

Discussion

In today's society, which is marked by an increasing number of divorces and unhappy marriages, healthy marriages are not easily achieved. Happiness in marriage depends on the proper selection of a spouse. In order to make a successful spouse selection, it is important that expectations be based on a solid understanding of the aims of marriage and that proper decisions are made about whether or not these expectations are realistic [2,8].

According to the social role theory, men and women traditionally play different roles in society. Both genders are socialized in a way consistent with their social gender roles. As a consequence of socialization, physical attractiveness and parental discipline are identified with women, while income capacity, physical strength and self-confidence are traditionally identified with men. Men, therefore, tend to seek physical attractiveness and parental discipline in their potential spouse, while women tend to seek a high level of income, physical strength and self confidence in their potential spouse [9]. In the present study, the female students were shown to be more likely to prefer a good personality, education, income level and profession in their selection of spouses in comparison to the male students ($p < 0.05$). Similar to the present study, previous studies have also demonstrated that compared to male students, female students tended to show a greater preference that their prospective spouses have a good personality [1], education [10,11], income level, and profession [1,3,10-14]. Personality traits function as a factor that affects the success and failure of virtually all of the different components that go into shaping an individual's lifestyle. The successful maintenance of marriage life depends in large part on the adoption of certain personality traits [4]. It is believed by the researchers in the present study that the importance female

students attribute to spouse selection ultimately forms the basis of a healthy marriage process.

Since the patriarchal structure of the Turkish society is an advantageous situation for males, they are not interested in having this structure changed. This can be seen in the fact that the males in the study reported that they preferred females to be "religious and respectful to traditions" within the scope of 'respect for tradition', basing this perspective on religion [15]. The male students within the study placed more importance on the idea of 'belonging to a similar sect' in spouse selection than their female counterpart ($p < 0.05$). In contrast to these findings, the studies conducted by Farajzadeh (2011) in Ankara and by Bener (2011) in Isparta found that the female students placed more importance on 'belonging to a similar sect' in spouse selection than the male students. These conflicting results are thought to be caused by the fact that these previous studies were conducted in western parts of Turkey, while the present study was conducted in the eastern part of Turkey, where there is a more patriarchal society structure.

The study did not find a statistically significant relationship between 'having a good physical appearance and strong health' and gender in spouse selection ($p < 0.05$). Likewise, the studies in the literature also found no relationship between these variables [9,10]. However, Shackelford et al. (2004) reported that males ranked physical attractiveness first in terms of the criteria they used for spouse selection. This particular difference was thought to be caused by the fact that the studies were conducted in different cultures and periods.

In the present study, no statistically significant difference was found between the students' 'ideal marriage age' and their gender ($p > 0.05$). The students' mean ideal marriage age was determined to be 26.25±3.35. The Directorate

General of Family and Community Services under the Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Policies (2015) reported that the most ideal marriage age was considered to be 25-29 for males and 20-24 for females. These ranges of ideal marriage ages as reported by the Directorate were similar to those found in the present study.

Because the closed society structure based on the kinship system has recently collapsed, the rate of marriages to collateral kin or to persons within the immediate vicinity has decreased. Similarly, since the family's role in spouse selection has diminished over time, the tradition of "arranged marriages" has lost its effect [17]. The present study indicated that female students were more interested than the male students in getting married after first going through a flirting period ($p<0.05$). The primary reasons for this case are thought to be the result of the changing society structure, the development stage of the female students, who are in a transition period from adolescence to adulthood, and the higher education levels of the female students' parents compared to those of the male students' parents ($p<0.05$). To further account for this case, in addition to the data from the study showing that the number of female students who grew up in nuclear families was higher than that of the male students ($p<0.05$), it is believed that the female students' developmental period and education have a significantly greater impact on them compared to the male students. Previous studies have indicated that the transition from adolescence to adulthood resulted in the decreased effect families and relatives have on decision making and the increase in self-decisions made by individuals, and that families played an important role in learning the gender roles [8]. A study conducted by Koçak (2008) on 500 married primary school administrators showed that the level of marriage satisfaction of the couples who got married after going through a flirting period was higher than that of those in an arranged marriage setup [18]. It was considered to be a healthy practice in the marriage selection process that the female students in the present study were more in favor than the male students of not getting married until after first going through a flirting period.

The study did not find a statistically significant relationship between 'the person who would ultimately decide on to whom one got married' and gender; rather, a great majority of the students stated that they themselves would be responsible for deciding on the person to whom they would get married. This finding from the present study supported the findings in previous studies [3, 10].

To summarize, the present study found that the female students placed more importance on personality, profession and income level, and that they wanted to get married after first going through a flirting period. University life marks a period during which young people share the same physical environment and get ideationally prepared for marriage. The spouse preferences formed during this important

period will affect the students' marriage decisions in the future. The study has revealed that the basic elements governing the spouse selection preferences of the female university students set the tone for a healthy marriage; however, the male students tended to place more importance on their prospective spouse belonging to a similar sect, as a consequence of the characteristic criteria derived from traditional gender identity roles. With that said, in order to prevent students from harboring potentially misguided spouse selection preferences, all university students, particularly the males, should be provided with education practices directed towards raising awareness about spouse selection preferences and about influencing factors and be offered, on request, premarital counseling services.

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