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Spouse and mother-in-law rejection and marital adjustment of Turkish women with child and adult marriage

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Abstract

Child marriages occur between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child and take place without children being physiologically or psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and having children. Child marriages among women are prevalent in Turkey and linked with number of negative outcomes. The aim of this study is to investigate the predictor role of spouse and mother-in-law rejection on marital adjustment and whether this relationship differs for Turkish women married under and above 18. Results revealed that women who were married as children had significantly higher scores for spouse and mother-in-law rejection and lower marital adjustment than women married above 18. Additionally, the marital adjustment of women married as children and by the marriage of choice was significantly lower than women who had married at an adult age and by the marriage of choice. Moderation analysis, which was made by Process macro, indicated that marital age and mother-in-law rejection had a moderator role in the relationship between overall spousal rejection and marital adjustment. In conclusion, this study provides a unique contribution to the relevant literature in Turkish culture in terms of comparing women married under the age of 18 and above 18.

Keywords

Early marriage, child marriage, partner rejection, mother-in-law, marital adjustment

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Introduction

Early marriage is defined as formal or informal union before age 18 (UNICEF, 2001). Early marriage (also referred to as child marriage interchangeably) is performed before girls and boys are ready to carry out the responsibilities of marriage (United Nations Population Found, UNFPA, 2007). According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) 2021 report, "approximately 650 million girls and women alive today were married before their 18th birthday". This body also states that child marriage poses a threat to the health, well-being and rights of young girls. Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia have the highest rate of child marriage. Thirty-four percent of young women in Sub-Saharan Africa and 28% of girls in South Asia were married in childhood (UNICEF, 2021). In Turkey, the Turkey Population and Health Survey in 2018 indicated that 21% of women were married before 18, while 4% of them got married before 15 (TNSA, 2018). Research on Family Structure in Turkey includes sections that provide important statistical data on household characteristics, education, and marriage, view of children, divorce, social perceptions, family, kinship and old age. According to this data, the marital age of 31% of women in Turkey in 2006 was below 18, while between ages 15–17 it was 24% (Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services, MFLSS, 2016). The percentage of women married below 14 in 2011 was 4%.

Only men and women over age 18 in Turkey can legally marry. However, in extraordinary circumstances, marriage of individuals at 16 may be permitted by court decision (Duran & Eraslan, 2019). Exceptional situations may be that the girl loses her virginity or becomes pregnant (Boran, 2013), but since such situations are not clearly defined, they are used to children's disadvantage and pave the way for early marriage (Dağ, 2021). Actual child marriage statistics only cover age 16 and above. However, considering unregistered religious marriages, the child marriage rate in Turkey is higher than the official statistics (Dağ, 2021; Gök, 2016). From this point of view, the rate of child marriages in Turkey covers at least 30–35% of all marriages and approximately 1 out of every 3 marriage in Turkey is a child marriage (Gök, 2016). Moreover, early marriages are associated with poorer life satisfaction and marital adjustment, violence and abuse, feminization of poverty, and even psychological disorders (Erulkar, 2013; Güneş et al., 2016; Stanley et al., 2012; Tezcan & Coşkun, 2004). Considering the high rates of early marriage and various problems caused by early marriages, we can say that the early marriage of girls continues to pose a severe problem in Turkey. For the physical and psychological health of individuals, examining marital quality and its correlates is crucial. Thus, here we aim to shed light on marital adjustment and its predictors by comparing early and adult marriages in Turkish women.

Marital adjustment

Locke and Wallace (1959) defined marital adjustment as an accommodation of a husband and wife to each other. Marital adjustment is also defined as the satisfaction and happiness of couples from their shared and individual lives (Jiang et al., 2013; Rao, 2017). In their study reviewing 64 cases of empirical research about marriage and health, Kiecolt-Glaser

and Newton (2001) stated that marital adjustment promotes emotional warmth and enjoyment of the marital relationship. Also, it helps partners to improve their physical and mental health. Like many other psychological concepts, marital adjustment can be strengthened or weakened by some factors. The timing of marriage is considered to be one of these factors which has a great effect on marital adjustment. According to Akhani et al. (1999), females who marry at an older age have higher marital satisfaction than females who marry young. Shaud and Asad (Shaud & Asad, 2020) compared marital adjustment of women married before 18 and after 30. They stated that women in later marriages had higher marital adjustment than women with early marriages. It has been reported that higher marital age predicts increased stability and satisfaction (Akhani et al., 1999; Karney & Bradbury 1995). Lehrer (2008) discussed that higher psychological maturity at the time of wedding predicts greater marital success. In Turkey, it is likewise stated that the group with the lowest level of marital adjustment in both women and men is the one with a marital age of 15–19 (Şener, 2002). A large age difference between spouses also negatively affects marital adjustment (Rahmani et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2012). Although national and international studies (e.g., Güneş et al., 2016; Shaud & Asad, 2020; Şener, 2002) indicated that marital age affects marital adjustment, it is clear that marital adjustment in child marriages in different cultures needs to be examined more deeply in the context of different variables. Early marriages have begun to be reported in the media and have started to be examined scientifically in our country. For these reasons, in this study, examining the relationships between child marriages and marital adjustment together with different psychological variables is important in terms of understanding its detrimental effect.

Besides marital age, type of marriage is another factor that affects marital adjustment. Types of marriage are related to how the decision to marry is made, in other words, how individuals decide whom to marry. Applbaum (1995) described two types of marriage which include "love marriages" and "arranged marriages". Love marriages depend on love between spouses; personal relationship and common interests are important. In arranged marriages, families play a key role in selecting girls' husbands. Moreover, post-marriage adjustment is not as important as family alliances in arranged marriages. According to Hortaçsu (2007), there is also a milder version of arranged marriages which includes the introduction of potential spouses by families, after which, she or he decides at free will whether or not to marry the prospective spouse. In Turkey, arranged marriages are still common practice along with love marriages and modified versions of arranged marriages in which two parties are introduced by families, but they freely make their own final decisions about getting married. According to studies, choosing one's own spouse is positively correlated with the greater closeness between spouses (Pimentel, 2000). Individuals with a marriage of choice have greater marital adjustment than those who had arranged marriages (Dinna, 2006; Durğut & Kısa, 2018; Güzel & Altay, 2012; Hortaçsu, 2007; Xiaohe & Whyte, 1990). According to the data from Research on Family Structure in Turkey, %59.9 of all marriages in Turkey were arranged by families (MFLSS, 2016). Arranged marriages are also common in early marriage. However, according to the findings of national studies, the majority of early marriages were arranged without the child's consent (Anık & Barlin, 2017; Durdu & Yelboga, 2016). Consistent with these

findings, Jensen and Thornton (2003) also state that families generally arrange child marriages, and girls do not have a say about the choice of spouse, the time of marriage, or getting to know their future spouse before wedding. These studies emphasize that like the marital age, types of marriage also affect marital adjustment. In this context, it seems important to consider the variables of marital age and type of marriage together. Although, in the literature, it is stated that early marriages are generally arranged by families, how this situation affects marital adjustment has not been investigated. For this reason, it is crucial for the present study to investigate how spousal choice affects marital adjustment.

Interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory

Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPART) is defined the theory as "evidence-based theory of socialization and lifelong development" and stated that all individuals in the world need to feel close to those who are important to them regardless of their culture, race, physical appearance and social status (Rohner, 2004, p. 831). According to IPARTheory, the interpersonal acceptance and rejection forms a continuum called the "warmth dimension" which is related to the quality of the bond between two persons (Rohner, 2014). In IPAR Theory *acceptance* is defined as the warmth, affection, love, and support that the partner can express physically or verbally, while *rejection* can be defined as the hostile and aggressive behavior, devoid of warmth, affection, and love. In the current study, the quality of relationship between spouse and mother in-law is examined within the context of IPARTheory.

Relationship quality between spouse and mother-in-law

The quality of the relationship with a spouse is thought to be one of the most important factors affecting the marital adjustment. In a study investigating the associations about perceived intimate partner acceptance and marital adjustment of 624 Turkish married individuals, perceived intimate partner rejection is found to be associated with marital adjustment (Aracı-İyiaydın & Sümer, 2021). As mentioned earlier, girls are not consulted before the marriage (Mikhail, 2002). In this study, 64.3% of early-married women reported that their marriage was arranged by families. Women whose opinions were not asked before marriage face similar situations after marriage in which they do not have the power to make decisions even on matters that concern them. These women have no say on daily issues, such as visiting their families, health, home expenses, having children, the number of children desired. Their spouses have the last word on these matters (Santhya et al., 2010). The women stated that they do not even have permission to go shopping by themselves to meet their simple needs, that they were completely socially isolated (Tuğrul, 2018), and that they were not allowed to visit their families (Cevheroğlu & Kışlak, 2022). Women in such circumstances may be more likely to think that their husbands have neglected them and ignored their needs. Therefore, they may feel rejected. Individuals who perceive rejection from their partners may believe that they are not worthy of being loved. Their satisfaction from their intimate relationships decreases even further due to the damage to their self-esteem (Rohner, 2004).

In the current study, the relationship quality between women and their mother in-law is also examined in the concept of IPARTheory. Marital age can also be important in terms of establishing good relationship with the in-laws. When individuals get married, their relationship with their in-laws is crucial for them and their marriage. Considering that having a combative relationship with the in-laws negatively affects the marriage (Bryant et al., 2001; Cao et al., 2019; Yuan, 2019), establishing proper relationships with the extended family is extremely important. In studies dealing with this issue, the mother-in-law relationship stands out (Fischer, 1983; Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987; Vera-Sanso, 1999). In almost all cultures, the mother-in-law is described as an oppressive person that causes tension between spouses (Shih & Pyke, 2010; Yakali-Çamoğlu, 2007) and as an individual who negatively affects marital adjustment (Labi Ades, 2003; Timmer & Veroff, 2000). For marital adjustment, the marriage of young girls has severe consequences for them regarding their position and responsibilities within the home (Jensen & Thornton, 2003; Nour, 2009) and the balance of power (McFarlane et al., 2016). According to the report of Grand National Assembly of Turkey, when girls are married at an early age, it is thought that they will obey their spouse and his family, so families of the groom want to get a young bride to push her to adapt to their family traditions more easily (Grand National Assembly of Turkey, 2010). Yet, young girls who are married without the awareness of the responsibilities of marriage that generally comes with age (Bhutto et al., 2013) may have difficulties establishing good relationship with their mother-in-law. Girls in early marriages need to develop a good relationship with their mother-in-laws since the young couple generally lives with the extended family, and in some cases, the man works in a family business all his life (Green et al., 2006). In the current study, 73.4% of early-married women stated that they lived with their in-laws when they got married, while this rate is 17.5% for women who married as adults. Besides living with in-laws, the rate of violence from the mother-in-law toward early-married women (13%) is also higher than for women married as adults (4.2%). Women living with their in-laws spend more time with their mother-in-law than their husbands in the first years of marriage. Women living with their in-laws are responsible for many domestic issues (Chen, 1999), but they are generally treated unfairly by in-laws (Altman et al., 1992). Therefore, living with in-laws and violence from mother-in-law is important variables that affect marital adjustment, they were added as covariates. Considering that the relations with mother-in-law are generally combative (Bryant et al., 2001) and that the mothers-in-law do not always treat young girls fairly (Grand National Assembly of Turkey, 2010), it is thought that perception of rejection from mother-in-law may decrease women's marital adjustment.

The current study

Although families continue to play an important role in the initiation of marriage, Hortacsu (1999) stated that the number of marriages based on romantic relationships has also increased. Although the number of partners who are making their own decision to marry has increased in Turkey, the commitment to extended families continues to be an important phenomenon (Selçuk & İmamoğlu, 2018). Various studies indicate that the nature of marriage in Turkey includes both traditional and contemporary aspects (Bolak-

Boratav et al., 2014; Fisek & Scherler, 1996). For this reason, we believe that it is important to examine the marital relations established with different bases. To our knowledge, no studies have been found in Turkey that compare women in early marriages with women married as adults in terms of the marital age effect on the relationship with the in-laws and subsequently, on marital adjustment. Considering that traditions and cultural issues have an important place in the realization of marriages, understanding early marriages is important for marriage studies. The types of disadvantages early marriage may create for women's married life is still an under-researched issue. It is critical to investigate these issues in societies such as Turkey, where importance is given to marriage and ties with the extended family. It is thought that scientific findings that bring attention to possible disadvantages of early marriage not only in terms of physical and psychological health, but also in terms of the institution of marriage, have an important value in Turkish society. For this purpose, in the present study, variables related to the marriages of women who married at an early and adult age are discussed. In the light of the research findings summarized above, we centered our investigation on the following research questions:

RQ1: How do spousal and mother-in-law rejection and marital adjustment differ between women married before and after 18 years of age in the presence of covariates such as duration of marriage, violence from mothers-in-law and living with the in-laws?
RQ2: Does women's marital adjustment differ according to marital age (those married before and after 18) and type of marriage (arranged or marriage of choice)?
RQ3: Does the relationship between women's perceived rejection from their spouses and marital adjustment vary according to marital age and perceived rejection from mother-in-law?

Method

Participants

The sample of the study consists of women married before and after 18. We collected data from 493 women between the ages of 18–60, but those who did not answer a large number of questions, who were under the age of 18, who had second marriage or who did not have a mother-in-law for some reason were excluded from the study. The analysis was performed with the responses of 419 participants in total, 207 (49.4%) were married before the age of 18, and 212 after the age of 18 (50.6%). The mean age of early married women was 34.14 (SD = 9.96), and the mean age of women married as adults was 31.11 (SD = 5.77). Seventy three percent of early married women and 17.5% of women married as adults lived in the same house with their in-laws after marriage. Detailed information about the participants are presented in Table 1.

Measures

Personal information form. The personal information form developed by the researchers aims to obtain socio-demographic information about the participants.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants.

	Women married before 18 N = 207		Women married after 18 N = 212	
Variables	N	%	N	%
Level of education				
Elementary school graduate	98	47.3	14	6.6
Secondary & high school graduate	91	44.0	48	22.6
University graduate	18	8.7	150	70.8
Type of marriage				
Arranged	133	64.3	31	14.6
Choice	74	35.7	181	85.4
Violence from mother in-law				
Yes	27	13	9	4.2
No	180	87	203	95.8
Lived with in-laws				
Yes	152	73.4	37	17.5
No	55	26.6	175	82.5
Income[a]				
Less than 1500 TL	67	32.4	2	0.9
Between 1500 TL-3000 TL	86	41.5	63	29.7
More than 3000 TL	52	25.1	147	69.3
Age difference between spouses				
10 years and more	35	16.9	5	2.4
10 years and less	172	83.1	207	97.6

[a]When the data has been collected, the minimum wage in Turkey was 1603 Turkish Liras, equivalent of 405 dollars.

Intimate adult relationship questionnaire - short form (IARQ/SF). IARQ/SF was developed by Rohner (2013) to measure the acceptance or rejection perceived by the person in relation to his/her partner. High scores from the scale indicate higher perceived rejection. The test-retest reliability coefficient of the scale is reported to be .97, and correlations between its subscales are between .49 and .79 (Rohner, 2013).

The validity and reliability study of the short form of the scale was performed by Akün (2019). The short form of the scale consists of 24 items. The scale consists of four subscales: warmth/affection (8 items), hostility/aggression (6 items), indifference/neglect (6 items), and undifferentiated rejection (4 items). In order to calculate the total score of the scale, first of all, all warmth/affection items should be reverse coded and then added together with the other subscale scores. The total score ranges from 24 to 96. As the total score increases, the perceived rejection of the individual in his relationship with his spouse or partner also increases. The following is an example item: "says nice things about me" Responses ranged from 1 (almost never true) to 4 (almost always true). Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient for the total score of the short form of

the scale was calculated to be .88. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the total score of the scale was calculated to be .95.

Mother-in-law acceptance-rejection questionnaire (MLARQ/SF). In-law Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (ILARQ), which was developed by Rohner (2010), aims to measure the acceptance or rejection that a person perceives in their relationship with their in-laws. High scores from the scale indicate higher perceived rejection. In this study, only a mother-in-law rejection scale was used. The validity and reliability study of the short form of the scale was performed by Cevheroğlu et al. (2022). The short form of the scale consists of 24 items. The following is an example item: "frightens or threatens me when I do something she doesn't approve of" Responses ranged from 1 (almost never true) to 4 (almost always true). Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient for the total score of the short form of the scale was calculated as .93. In the present study, the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was found to be .95 for this score.

Marital adjustment scale (MAS). Locke and Wallace (1959) developed MAS to measure satisfaction and marital adjustment in the marital relationship; it consists of 15 items. The validity and reliability study of the scale was performed by Tutarel-Kışlak (1999). MAS includes a general adjustment question, eight questions that measure agreement areas, and six questions that measure conflict resolution, loyalty, and communication. Each item on the scale receives a score between 0 and 6, which differs according to the number of options. According to this; Item 1 is evaluated between 0–6 points, items between two and nine are evaluated between 0–5 points, and 10th and 14th items are evaluated between 0–2 points, and the 11th and 13th items are evaluated between 0–3 points. In item 12, if one of the spouses prefers to stay at home and the other to do something outside 0 points are scored, and if both spouses prefer to do something outside or stay at home, 1 point is given. The 15th item is evaluated between 0–2 points. The total score obtained from the scale ranges from 0 to 58. Higher scores indicates higher marital adjustment. The following is an example item: "How much of your outdoor activities do you do with your spouse?" Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the MAS was .80. In the current study, the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be .91.

Results

Comparison of women who married before and after 18 in terms of the research variables

We examined whether the scores obtained from the research variables differ in marital age (those who married before and after 18) in line with our first research question. In this context, we performed two-way MANCOVA. Duration of marriage, violence from mothers-in-law and living with the in-laws were added as covariates. The assumptions of normality were checked with Kolmogorov-Smirnov and normality was not violated in the presence of covariates ($W = .99$, $p = .236$). Duration of marriage [($F_{(1,414)} = 6.18$, $p = .013$)], violence from mother-in-law [($F_{(1,414)} = 6.81$, $p = .009$)], and living with the

Table 2. One-Way Variance Analysis Results for Scores Taken from Research Variables in Terms of Marital Age.

	Women married before 18		Women married after 18		
	X	*SD*	X	*SD*	F
IARQ	46.57	18.15	39.91	15.15	16.71***
MLARQ	51.27	19.40	44.45	17.24	14.47***
MAS	27.58	11.27	37.99	11.82	85.05***

IARQ = Intimate Adult Relationship Questionnaire, MLARQ = Mother-in-Law Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire, MAS= Marital Adjustment Scale, ***$p < .001$.

in-laws [($F_{(1,414)} = 8.72$, $p = .003$)], had significant covariate effects on marital adjustment. Besides, violence from mothers-in-law had significant covariate effect on mother-in-law rejection [($F_{(1,414)} = 58.89$, $p = .001$)] and spousal rejection [($F_{(1,414)} = 29.19$, $p = .001$)].

According to the results of MANCOVA analysis, we found that marital age had a significant effect on research variables [(Wilks' $\lambda = .74$, $F_{(1, 418)} = 15.88$; $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 26$)].

In Table 2, it can be seen that marital age had the main effect on spousal rejection (SR), mother-in-law rejection (MR), and marital adjustment (MA).

Women married before 18 had significantly higher scores than women married after 18 in SR [$F_{1\text{-}417} = 16.71$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$] and MR [$F_{1\text{-}417} = 14.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .03$]. The difference between the two groups also seemed to be significant in terms of MA. According to the results of the analysis, the MA of women married before 18 were significantly lower than those married after 18 [$F_{1\text{-}417} = 85.05$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .17$]. Cohen's (1988) effect size criteria for eta squared (η^2) were used: .01–.05, small; .06–.13, medium, and >.14 large.

Examination of marital adjustment scores in terms of marital age and type of marriage

At this stage of the study, in line with our second research question, we examined whether the scores obtained from the MAS differed according to the marital age (those who married before and after 18) and the type of marriage (arranged marriage and marriage of choice). In this context, we performed a two-variable analysis of variance (ANOVA), including the marital age (2) x type of marriage (2). Tests were made to confirm the assumptions of ANOVA. The assumptions of normality were not violated for the analysis ($S = .0561$, $p = .143$). The Bartlett's test for homogeneity of variances was also used and it was concluded that variances are equal for all samples [($F_{3,\ 415} = 7.47$, $p = .058$)].

As a result of the variance analysis conducted for the MAS, we determined that the marital age [($F_{(1\text{-}415)} = 20.53$, $p < .01$)] and the type of marriage [($F_{(1\text{-}415)} = 24.64$, $p < .01$)] had a main effect on the scores obtained from the MAS. According to the results, the

MA of women married before 18 (M = 27.6, SD = 11.3) was lower than that of women married after 18 (M = 38.0, SD = 11.8). When evaluated in terms of marriage type, we found that MA of women who had arranged marriages (M = 27.1, SD = 10.3) was lower than those who had a marriage of choice (M = 36.6, SD = 12.7). As a result of the variance analysis conducted for the MA, we determined that interaction effect of marital age and the type of marriage was significant [($F_{1\text{-}415}$ = 9.89, p < .01)]. Tukey-Kramer test was performed to determine the differences between these groups. According to the results, the MAS scores of women who had a marriage of choice before 18 (M = 29.2, SD = 13.2), and women who had arranged marriages after 18 (M = 28.6, SD = 11.5) were significantly lower than the MAS scores of women who had a marriage of choice after 18 (M = 39.60, SD = 11.13).

Moderating role of marital age and mother-in-law rejection between spousal rejection and marital adjustment

In line with our third research question the PROCESS macro-Model 2 developed by Hayes (2013) was used to determine whether the marital age and the MR have a moderating effect between SR and MA. According to the relevant literature, there are inconsistent results about duration of marriage, which may cause decrease (Bharambe & Baviskar, 2013; Güzel & Altay, 2012) or increase (Jose & Alfons, 2007; Rahmani et al., 2009) in MA. Therefore, duration of marriage was included as a control variable in the moderator analyses to minimize potential confounding effects. During the moderation analyses, marital age and MR were mean-centered to reduce the prospect of multicollinearity.

When the direct effects were examined, SR (B = −.47, p < .01) and marital age (B = −6.47, p < .001) significantly predicted MA. There was no significant relationship between MR and MA (B = .00, p > .05). When the moderating effects were examined, it was seen that the interaction effect of SR and marital age (Spousal rejection X Marital age) on MA was significant (B = .21, p < .01) (Figure 1).

To examine the interaction effect, the relationship between SR and MA was tested in women married before and after 18. The results showed that the relationship between SR and MA was significant in both women who married before (B = −.21, p < .001) and after 18 (B = −.41, p < .001), but this relationship was stronger in women married after age 18 (Figure 2).

In other words, it was understood that SR tended to decrease marital adjustment more in women married after 18. According to the results, spousal rejection X marital age interaction effect explained 1.7% (R^2 change = .0172) of the change in MA ($F_{1,412}$ = 12.72, p = .000).

The interaction effect of SR and MR (spousal rejection X mother-in-law rejection) on marital adjustment was also found to be significant (B = −.00, p < .01). Then, in order to examine this interaction effect, the relationship between SR and MA was examined in low MR (−1 SD) and high MR (+1 SD). The results showed that when MR was both high (B = −.52, p < .001) and low (B = −.41, p < .001) in women married after 18, SR was associated with lower MA, and that relationship was stronger at higher MR (Figure 3).

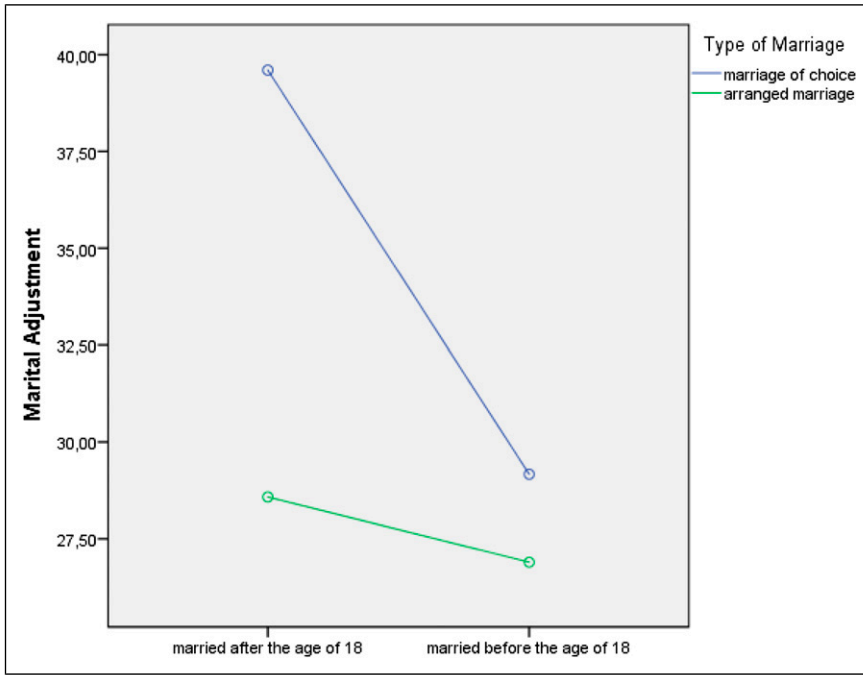


Figure 1. Examination of marital adjustment scores in terms of marital age and type of marriage.

Similarly, MR is both high ($B = -.53, p < .001$) and low ($B = -.21, p < .001$) in women married before 18 and SR was associated with low MA. It was seen that this relationship was stronger with higher MR (Figure 4).

According to the results, MA was lower when SR and MR were high. The interaction effect of SR X MR explained 1% (R^2 change = .0057) of the change in MA ($F_{1,412}$ = 12.72, p = .040). According to the results of multiple moderator analysis, it was seen that the whole model was significant ($F_{(6,412)}$ = 54.34, p = .000) and explained 44% of the variance in MA.

Discussion

This study was designed to examine the predictor role of spouse and mother-in-law rejection on marital adjustment and whether this relationship differs for Turkish women married under and above 18. Within the framework of the first research question of the study, we first examined whether women who married before and after 18 differed significantly in terms of their scores related to the research variables. We observed that early-married women perceived significantly higher levels of rejection from their mother-in-law. In the current study, we observed that 13% of early-married women are subjected to violence from their mothers-in-law, while this rate is 4.2% for women married at an adult age. It also seems reasonable that women exposed to more violence of their mothers-

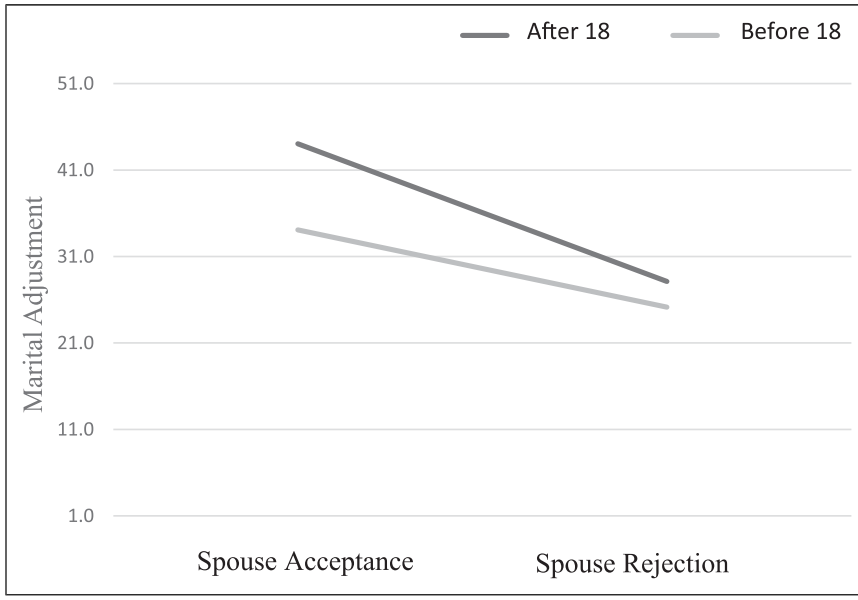


Figure 2. Moderator role of marital age between spouse acceptance-rejection and marital adjustment.

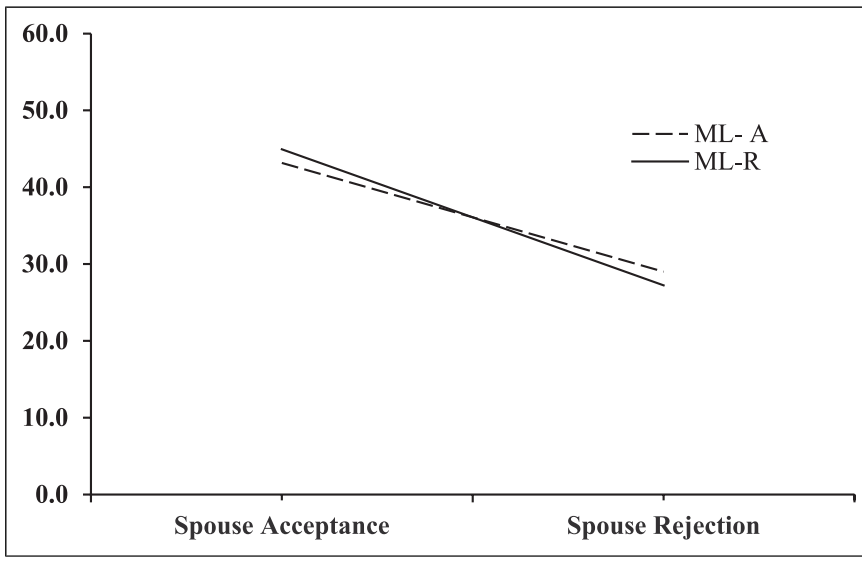


Figure 3. The moderating role of mother-in-law acceptance-rejection levels of women married after 18 between spouse acceptance-rejection and marital adjustment (ML = Mother-in-law, A = Acceptance, R = Rejection).



Figure 4. The moderating role of mother-in-law acceptance rejection levels of women married before 18 between spouse acceptance rejection and marital adjustment (ML = Mother-İn-law, A = Acceptance, R = Rejection).

in-law have perceived more rejection. In the present study, 73.4% of the early-married women stated that they lived with their in-laws when they got married, while this rate was 17.5% for the women married as adults. Women living with their in-laws spend more time with their mothers-in-law than their spouses in the first years of marriage, they are responsible for many household issues, (Chen, 1999) and these women are generally treated unfairly by their in-laws (Altman et al., 1992). A study showed that 75% percent of women are not satisfied with their relationship with their mother-in-law and complain that their mother-in-law is excessively intrusive (Linn & Breslerman, 1996). Women complain about their mother-in-law regarding issues such as they interfere in domestic decisions, the number of children, and whether to have children or not (Kadir et al., 2003). It may be said that these people, who had to undertake significant responsibilities by leaving their homes at a young age, with little life experience, are more exposed to intrusive attitudes from their mother-in-law. As a result, bonding with the in-laws becomes difficult (Rohner, 2008).

In the current study, we observed that the marital adjustment of women who married before 18 was lower than those who married after 18. It is emphasized that the older age in marriage increases marital adjustment and satisfaction (Akhani et al., 1999; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Shaud & Asad, 2018; Yizengaw et al., 2014). More than half of the women who marry early are generally 10 years or younger than their spouses. Although the age difference is not examined in this study, this age difference may affect communication, mutual understanding, and family balance, leading men to be more dominant and have more control in the relationship. Relationships in which men are older than women generally create situations in men's favor and to women's disadvantage (Gustafson & Fransson, 2015). As this situation naturally causes women to perceive their

spouses as more dominant and oppressive, it can also be assumed that they have a lower chance of communicating effectively with their spouses, which is reflected negatively on their marital adjustment (Alemu, 2008). To illustrate further, early-married women are forced by their spouses to have sexual intercourse three times or more on the first night of marriage (Güneş et al., 2016; Ouattara et al., 1998). Sexual relations in early marriages are usually realized against the girls' wishes (Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003; Kidman, 2016). Sexual satisfaction is associated with marital satisfaction (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005; Yeh et al., 2006). However, exposure to sexual abuse in childhood results in low relationship satisfaction in adulthood (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000; DiLillo & Long, 1999; DiLillo, 2001). Based on this, we may assume that early-married women may have low sexual satisfaction and, accordingly, lower marital adjustment.

The analyses also showed that the women who married before 18 perceived significantly higher spousal rejection than women married after 18. Spousal acceptance has been defined as warmth, care and love that the spouse can express physically or verbally. It was observed that women who married before 18 perceived less acceptance from their spouses. In other words, women who marry at an early age think that they do not receive attention and love from their spouses that their spouses are indifferent to women's interests and needs, and they are physically and psychologically inaccessible for them. In a qualitative study it was stated that early-married women felt left alone by their husbands, that they were subjected to violence by their spouses, and they complained that they could not communicate with them. Women stated that their husbands were indifferent and cold, even if they did not show violence (Cevheroğlu & Kışlak, 2022). Early-married women mostly did not have any connection with their prospective husband before marriage (Durğut & Kısa, 2018; Taplak & Yılmaz, 2022), and they were frequently subjected to violence during their marriage (Nasrullah et al.,2014; Oshiro et al., 2011). It may be understandable that women think that their husbands neglect them and they are indifferent to their needs.

Our study also examined whether the scores derived from the MAS differed depending on the marital age (married before and after 18) and the type of marriage (by marriage of choice or arranged marriage) within the framework of the second research question. We have found that women who had a marriage of choice before 18, and women who had arranged marriages after 18 have lower marital adjustment than women who had a marriage of choice after 18. Yeşiltepe and Çelik (2014) stated that how spouses are chosen is one of the factors affecting marital adjustment. When individuals select their spouses themselves, they spend time together before getting married and make decisions based on their emotional intimacy and personal harmony (Pimentel, 2000). Women who choose their spouses have higher marital satisfaction than those who had arranged marriages (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013; Cingisiz, 2010; Çimen, 2007; Demir & Fışıloğlu, 1999; Xiaohe & Whyte, 1990). These are consistent with our finding that women, who had arranged marriages even after 18, had lower marital adjustment than those who got married by marriage of choice. In our study, the majority of early-married women had arranged marriages. In other words, they rarely or very briefly had had the chance to see their future spouse. The marital adjustment of these women was lower than those who had the opportunity to meet and get to know their future spouse. This point establishes the

importance of getting to know a person before getting married. We have also confirmed that establishing a more harmonious marriage may be realized through marriage after 18.

Within the framework of third research question, the effect of marital age and perceived rejection from mother-in-law in the relationship between spousal rejection and marital adjustment was investigated. According to the results, perceived spousal rejection reduces marital adjustment in both groups (those who marry before and after 18). Individuals' relationship satisfaction is related to how their spouse evaluate themselves (Swann et al., 1994). Individuals who perceive spousal rejection have a lower marital adjustment (Aracı-İyiaydın & Sümer, 2021; Bozkuş, 2014; Öztürk, 2013), while individuals who believe that they are evaluated positively by their spouses have higher relationship satisfaction (Murray et al., 1996). Evaluating a spouse as caring and understanding is related to sexual and marital satisfaction (Gadassi et al., 2016).

It was also seen that spousal rejection tended to lower the marital adjustment level more in women married after 18. In other words, it was observed that women married after 18 were more sensitive to spousal rejection than women married before 18. When they perceived rejection from their spouse, their marital adjustment decreased more. In the current study, 85.4% of women married after 18 were married after meeting their spouses themselves. The majority of women married at an adult age after getting to know each other, falling in love and concluding that their partner would be the ideal spouse. For this reason, it may be said that women who marry at an adult age are more affected when they perceive rejection from their spouses. They experience more disappointment concerning their expectations, and their marital adjustment decreases more. In this study, 64.3% of early-married women had arranged marriages, and it can be thought that their expectations about marriage and their spouses are low. On the other hand, it is stated that the gender roles are one of the mechanisms that maintains the early marriage. According to traditional gender roles, girls are expected to marry, become mothers, take care of children, and act as caregivers to their spouses (Burcu et al., 2015). Considering that early-married women generally adopt these thoughts (Jensen & Thornton, 2003; Santhya et al., 2010; UNICEF, 2005), it can be said that they do not see the perceived rejection as a situation that will create discord in marriage and they may believe this situation to be acceptable. Moreover, the marriage of young girls before 18 leaves them vulnerable to all forms of violence (Belhorma, 2016). For this reason, it can be thought that spousal rejection, which can be considered psychological violence, may be accepted by early-married women, that it is not even seen as a violence, and may affect marital adjustment less than women married at an adult age (Table 3).ad

Research findings have shown that the interaction effect between spousal rejection and mother-in-law rejection on marital adjustment is significant. Accordingly, when mother-in-law rejection is both high and low in women married before and after 18, it is seen that spousal rejection is associated with lower marital adjustment, and this relationship is stronger when there is greater mother-in-law rejection. It has been found that mother-in-law rejection affects the marital adjustment of all women married both before and after 18, and it has strengthened the effect of spousal rejection on marital adjustment. From this point of view, it can be stated that the relationship with the mother-in-law is an important factor for Turkish daughters-in-law. Relationships with the in-laws play an indispensable

Table 3. The Moderator Effect of Marital Age and Mother-in-Law Rejection on The Relationship Between Spousal Rejection and Marital Adjustment.

	%95 BCa confidence interval			
Variable	B	SH	Low	High
Spouse rejection	−.47	.05	−.5579	**−.3787**
Marital age	−6.47	1.112	−8.665	**−4.272**
ML rejection	−.00	.03	−.0552	**.0551**
Spouse rejection X marital age	.21	.06	.0923	**.3191**
Spouse rejection X ML rejection	.00	.00	−.0055	**−.0001**

role for the family in Turkey (Genç & Baptist, 2019). Although most families in Turkey seem like nuclear families, they are actually extended families, in other words, family members from different generations are emotionally and financially connected to each other (Ataca, 2006; Kağıtçıbaşı and Ataca, 2005). Obligation to maintain connection with extended families may cause a restriction of autonomy for couples, which can negatively affect the marital relationship (Genç & Baptist, 2019). Öztürk (2013) stated that women who perceive rejection from their mother-in-law experience more marital conflict. Experiencing more conflict in marriage is associated with lower marital adjustment. In the study of married women in Palestine, Rabho (2015) stated that women's relationship with their mother-in-law (and not always with her husband) is often the cause of stress and divorce in marriage. Furthermore, considering that girls leave their families at an early age and spend most of their time with their mothers-in-law, the perceived rejection from a mother-in-law who is supposed to be a new parent, that is, a new attachment figure, may reduce the level of marital adjustment. For these reasons, it may be understandable that the perceived rejection from her husband and mother-in-law, two important people who have an essential place in women's lives, reduces the level of marital adjustment.

In societies where child marriages are quite common such as Turkey, research on this subject is of great importance. This study draws attention to the effect of child marriage on women by comparing it with women married after 18, and reveals that early-married women are at a disadvantaged position regarding many relational issues such as entering arranged marriages, having less marital adjustment, being more vulnerable to the effects of in-laws, and feeling more rejected by the spouse. The findings from this study have some implications for mental health practitioners. Although the ties with the extended family are strong in Turkish culture, individual autonomy is also given importance. As mentioned before, the relationships established with the in-laws may damage the autonomy of nuclear families and this may cause problems within the marriage. It is clear that when studying women, especially early-married women, it is beneficial to examine the relationships with the in-laws. The findings will provide a roadmap to mental health practitioners, and by making use of these findings, the participation of spouses and extended family members in therapies and efforts to increase the communication skills of the family will contribute to the improvement of individuals' marital adjustment.

Supporting women in their communication and problem-solving skills may enable them to experience less difficulties in their relationships with their spouse and mother-in-law. Enhancing women's communication skills can help them better understand possible mother-in-law interventions in their marriage and clarify real boundaries in their relationships. Mother-in-law rejection examined within the concept of IPARTheory was an understudied area in the literature. With this study, we can say that mother-in-law rejection affects marital adjustment for all women. In future studies, it seems important to examine perceived acceptance and rejection from the mother-in-law and, more broadly from the in-law family, which may affect marital adjustment.

The findings of present study are also important for policy makers. It draws attention to the fact that early marriage causes various problems for girls. Considering this information, training should be conducted to increase the awareness of relevant public institutions and professionals, especially religious (imam) and social leaders (muhtar), teachers, and doctors, who are influential in villages and towns in regions where early marriage is common can be effective steps in this regard. In Turkey, various non-governmental organizations and women's associations carry out various campaigns and projects to prevent the early marriage of girls. It is thought that supporting the projects of non-governmental organizations in this area and obtaining the opinions of experts who have comprehensive knowledge about early marriage will benefit the fight against getting married girls off at an early age.

The present study has some limitations, and the first one is that the data here was obtained by employing measurement tools based on self-report. Therefore, the current research harbors similar limitations arising from this measurement method. Also, the data of this study was mostly collected from Instagram accounts. The sample of the current study consisted of women who have accession to the internet. This may pose problems in terms of the generalizability of the results. Also, we did not ask the location of the participants. This information may be important since different parts of Turkey may have different customs and traditions and different rates of early marriage. In the first research question, duration of the marriage, violence from mothers-in-law, and living with the in-laws had a significant covariate effect. Despite this, the relationship between independent and dependent variables continued to be observed. This finding may indicate that the relevant covariates may be one of the potential independent variables that may have an effect on the dependent variable. Future studies may focus on these variables. On the other hand, experimental studies can reach more causal inferences by considering these variables at a factor level. In addition, in the ANOVA analysis, the marital adjustment of women was compared in terms of marital age and type of marriage. The number of women married by arranged marriage is higher among early-married women, while marriage of choice is higher among women with adult marriages. Although ANOVA analyses use estimated marginal means in comparisons instead of row means, it is recommended that group numbers be closer in future studies. Also, the age range (18–60) and the duration of marriage (2–48 years) are fairly broad in this study. Although duration of marriage was controlled in the analysis, it may be helpful to limit the duration of marriage considering the likelihood that it varies between two and 48 years may affect the research findings. Early marriage is a multidimensional issue and affects not only women

but also their children. We believe that investigating the impact of early marriage on the children and the effects on the mother-child relationship in future studies can provide essential and comprehensive findings for the relevant literature. Because early marriage is seen 4–14 times more for girls (Aydemir, 2011; Misunas, 2019), this study only focused early-married women. Diverse patterns may arise for early and adult married men. Consideration of problems of early-married men is called for but remains under-studied.

Despite certain limitations, analysis of this study has shown that early marriage causes women numerous disadvantages in their marriage. Compared to women with adult marriage, early-married women perceive higher rejection from their spouse and mother-in-law and have lower marital adjustment. Statistical analysis of this study indicated significant connections between early marriage, spouse and mother-in-law rejection, and marital adjustment; leaving an impression that marital age and mother-in-law rejection can act as a moderator between spousal rejection and marital adjustment.

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The data used in the research are can be publicly posted but are available upon request. The data can be obtained by emailing: busra.aslan@erzurum.edu.tr. The materials used in the research can be publicly posted but are available upon request. The materials can be obtained by emailing: busra.aslan@erzurum.edu.tr.

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