



RESEARCH ARTICLE / ARAŞTIRMA YAZISI

Attachment Styles and Marital Satisfaction: A Comparative Study of North Cyprus and Saudi Arabia

Bağlanma Stilleri ve Evlilik Doyumu: Kuzey Kıbrıs ve Suudi Arabistan'da Karşılaştırmalı Bir Çalışma

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Abstract:

This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative research design to explore the relationship between attachment styles and marital satisfaction among Turkish Cypriot and Saudi couples, with a focus on gender, type of marriage, and number of children. A total of 201 married individuals participated, selected through convenience sampling; 100 resided in Northern Cyprus, and 101 lived in Saudi Arabia. The majority of participants were university graduates aged 35-44. Data collection included the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R), the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), and a personal information form developed by the researchers. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Spearman correlation, the Mann-Whitney U test, and multiple regression in SPSS version 29. The results indicated that both anxious ($r = -0.688$) and avoidant ($r = -0.564$) attachment styles were significantly and negatively associated with marital satisfaction in both samples. Additionally, Turkish Cypriots reported higher marital satisfaction than their Saudi counterparts. Among Saudi participants, those in monogamous marriages exhibited higher marital satisfaction than those in polygamous marriages. Importantly, no significant relationship between gender and marital satisfaction was identified in either group. Overall, the findings suggest that marital satisfaction is linked to the number of children, attachment styles, and the type of marriage. These results are intended to provide insights for family counselors, psychologists, and social workers. Furthermore, it is recommended that future research examine attachment styles and marital satisfaction across different populations and with various variables.

Keywords: Attachment styles, Socio-cultural factors, Marital satisfaction, Gender roles, Cross-cultural study.

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Öz:

Bu çalışma nicel araştırma modeli kullanılarak tasarlanmış kesitsel bir araştırmadır. Araştırmanın amacı, cinsiyet, evlilik türü ve çocuk sayısına vurgu yaparak Kıbrıslı Türk ve Suudi çiftler arasında bağlanma stilleri ve evlilik doyumu arasındaki ilişkinin belirlenmesidir. Kolayda örnekleme yöntemiyle toplam 201 evli birey çalışmaya dahil edilmiştir; bunların 100'ü Kuzey Kıbrıs'ta, 101'i ise Suudi Arabistan'da yaşamaktadır. Katılımcıların çoğunluğu 35-44 yaş aralığında olup üniversite mezunudur. Veriler, Yakın İlişkiler-Revize Ölçeği, İlişki Değerlendirme Ölçeği ve araştırmacılar tarafından geliştirilen kişisel bilgi formu aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Elde edilen veriler SPSS 29 programında tanımlayıcı istatistikler, Spearman korelasyonu, Mann-Whitney U testi ve çoklu regresyon kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, her iki örnekleme de kaygılı ($r = -0.688$) ve kaçınmacı ($r = -0.564$) bağlanma stillerinin evlilik doyumu ile anlamlı ve negatif yönde ilişkili olduğunu ve Kıbrıslı Türklerin daha yüksek memnuniyet düzeyleri bildirdiğini göstermiştir. Tek eşli evlilik yapan Suudilerin, çok eşli evlilik yapanlara kıyasla daha yüksek düzeyde evlilik memnuniyeti hissettikleri belirlenmiştir. Her iki grupta da cinsiyetin evlilik doyumu ile anlamlı bir ilişki göstermediği saptanmıştır. Araştırma bulgularına göre evlilik doyumu çocuk sayısı, bağlanma tarzları ve evlilik türü ile ilişkilidir. Bu araştırmanın bulgularının aile danışmanları, psikologlar, sosyal hizmet uzmanları ve aile danışmanlarına yol gösterici olacağı düşünülmektedir. Ayrıca, bağlanma stilleri ve evlilik doyumunun farklı popülasyonlarda çeşitli değişkenlerle incelenmesinin yararlı olacağı düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bağlanma stilleri, Sosyo-kültürel faktörler, Evlilik doyumu, Toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri, Kültürler arası çalışma.

Introduction

A formal definition of marriage includes the legal, economic, and emotional joining of two consenting adults (Imam & Akhouri, 2022). However, the functions that marriage serves, such as supporting child development, strengthening family ties, providing economic advantages, and offering a stable foundation for shared work and resources, vary across cultures and regions. (Argyle, 2021; Sassler & Lichter, 2020). Although perspectives on marriage differ, research strongly suggests that successful marriages demonstrably benefit individuals, families, and communities (Umberson & Thomeer, 2020). A key indicator of a successful marriage is the marital satisfaction reported by the partners. Al-Darmaki et al. (2016) define marital satisfaction as the perceived balance of benefits and drawbacks experienced within a marital union. The significance of marital satisfaction on emotional well-being, mental and physical health, parenting efficacy, and overall life satisfaction has been explored by numerous researchers. Demographic factors, personality traits, religious and spiritual beliefs, sexual intimacy, parenting styles, and attachment styles have been shown to impact marital satisfaction (Yucel & Koydemir; Jose, 2007; Abbasi, 2016).

Attachment styles are derived from the attachment theory, developed initially by Bowlby (1969), and later refined by Ainsworth (1973) and other developmental researchers (Bowlby, 1979). Bowlby (1969) defines attachment as the deep emotional bonds individuals feel towards people they see as important. Attachment forms the foundation of interpersonal relationships, and the relationship established between the caregiver and the infant also supports adult relationships (Bowlby, 2012). Ainsworth identified three distinct patterns or styles of attachment, which were termed secure, anxious-resistant, ambivalent, and avoidant (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Although attachment theory was developed to explain the complex nature of infant-caregiver relationships, the theory was later extended to include emotional bonds between partners in adulthood. Some studies have shown that secure attachment styles correlate with higher levels of satisfaction, while insecure attachment styles correlate with lower levels (Kamel Abbasi et al., 2016; Martins et

al., 2023). However, Mohammadi, Samavi, and Ghazavi (2016) found that avoidant and anxious-ambivalent attachment styles were negatively associated with marital satisfaction, whereas secure attachment was not significantly associated. Findings on cross-cultural gender differences in adult attachment are inconsistent. For instance, Ergin and Dag (2013), working with a Turkish sample, reported that women scored significantly higher than men on anxious attachment. In contrast, Al-Jabeila (2019) found that men scored higher on secure attachment in a study of 380 married adults in Saudi Arabia. In contrast, no significant gender differences were observed in anxious or avoidant attachment. Such discrepancies are likely influenced by factors including the educational level, geographical location, and cultural values of the populations studied. These differences are thought to be caused by factors such as the educational level, geographical location and cultural values of the sample group from which the data were collected. Cross-cultural differences in attachment patterns are attributable to variations in relevant child-rearing beliefs and social norms (Pearson & Child, 2007).

In the cross-cultural literature, the dynamics of marriage is shaped by individualism and collectivism (Triandis, 1995). In individualist cultures, marriage is typically conceived as a self-selected partnership grounded in personal choice and affective gratification. On the other hand, in collectivist cultures, stronger bonds have been observed within families of origin, extended family networks, and marital kin (Keller, 2012).

Although studies on attachment styles and marital satisfaction exist in both Northern Cyprus and Saudi Arabia, no study has examined both societies together. In this respect, it is considered beneficial to be acquainted with the general characteristics of the two societies. The population of Northern Cyprus consists of native Turkish Cypriots and immigrants from Türkiye. Turkish culture, shaped in part by Islamic influences, is generally regarded as more collectivist compared to many Western cultures (Hofstede, 2001). Collectivist values also shape Saudi Arabian society, but these are strongly reinforced by conservative interpretations of Islam and tribal traditions

(Long & Maisel, 2010). The country maintains a highly patriarchal structure, where gender roles are rigidly defined and male authority is deeply embedded in both family and societal contexts (Alhazmi, 2016). Another critical factor in both societies is the divorce rate. There has been an upward trend in the divorce rate in North Cyprus. The divorce rate per 1,000 people was around 1.9% in 2005 and rose to 2.23% in 2023 (Yucel & Koydemir, 2015; TRNC State Planning Organization, 2024). Similarly, the divorce rate in Saudi Arabia has increased, reaching 2.18% per 1,000 individuals in 2020 (Alrebh & Al-Mabuk, 2025; General Authority for Statistics, 2021).

The present study investigates the correlation between sociocultural factors, attachment styles, and marital satisfaction through a cross-cultural comparative analysis of North Cyprus and Saudi Arabia. This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine how sociocultural factors, attachment styles, and marital satisfaction interrelate among married Turkish Cypriot and Saudi couples. Specifically, the research addressed two questions:

1. To what extent are attachment styles associated with marital satisfaction?
2. Do Turkish Cypriot and Saudi couples differ in their attachment styles and levels of marital satisfaction?

Methods

Sample

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling. The sample consisted of 201 married individuals, including 100 from North Cyprus and 101 from Saudi Arabia. All participants were 18 years of age or older and currently residing in their respective countries. Invitations to participate were shared through social media groups. Respondents who met the inclusion criteria-being married, at least 18 years old, and a current resident-completed an online questionnaire.

Procedure

The researchers proceeded without obtaining formal approval from the authors of the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised Scale and the Relationship Assessment Scale. The consent and demographic forms were translated into Turkish and Arabic by native speakers who ensured clarity and made necessary adjustments. Informed consent was secured from all participants in the study. The data were gathered spanning from December 2023 to February 2024. Participants typically completed the questionnaire in 30 minutes using Google Forms. Online survey administration may amplify social desirability bias when assessing cultural effects (Kreuter et al., 2008). Nevertheless, participants were explicitly informed that their responses would remain detached from personal identifiers; for sensitive items, Likert-type scales were utilized instead of binary response formats.

Measures

In addition to the personal information form, which included sociodemographic questions, the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale-Revised Form and the Relationship Assessment Scale were also used.

Personal Information Form

Researchers designed the Personal Information Form after reviewing existing demographic questionnaires in the attachment and marriage literature. The form included 15 closed-ended questions on:

Age, gender, income, education level, number of children, marital duration and type, sex education, gender roles, marital satisfaction, perceived marital quality.

Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R)

Attachment styles and interpersonal dynamics in relationships were assessed using the ECR-R. The ECR-R was developed initially by Brennan (1998). It comprises 36 items designed to measure maladaptive adult attachment patterns within romantic relationships. It has two subscales, named avoidance and anxiety. The Arabic version of the ECR-R demonstrated high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .89 for the avoidance subscale and .88 for the anxiety subscale (Al-Tamimi, 2009). Similarly, the Turkish adaptation showed substantial reliability, with Cronbach's alphas of .90 and .86 for the avoidance and anxiety subscales, respectively (Selçuk et al., 2005).

Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)

The RAS was developed initially by Hendrick (1988) to measure individuals' self-reported satisfaction with their intimate relationships. The scale consists of seven items that evaluate overall relationship satisfaction. Items such as "To what extent does your partner fulfil your needs?" are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction). The RAS has been translated into both Turkish and Arabic and has demonstrated acceptable reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .84 for the Arabic version (Al-Tamimi, 2009) and .87 for the Turkish version (Çelik, 2014).

Statistical analyses

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS, version 29. The study's hypotheses were tested using exploratory and descriptive analyses, Spearman correlation, the Mann-Whitney U test, and multiple regression. The scale's reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. Exploratory analysis revealed distribution patterns, outliers, and anomalies; descriptive statistics were utilized to summarize demographic information and central tendency measures. Multiple regression examined the effects of socio-cultural factors on marital satisfaction. While Spearman correlation explored associations between insecure attachment and marital satisfaction, the Mann-Whitney U test compared attachment and satisfaction levels by nationality, gender, and marital structure.

Results

Participants' sociodemographic characteristics

Table 1 illustrates the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants. The groups showed balanced gender ratios and high levels of education, with Saudis holding more master's degrees and Turkish Cypriots holding more doctorates. Turkish Cypriots were typically older and reported higher incomes.

Table 1. Participants' Sociodemographic Characteristics

Variable	Saudi (n =101)	Turkish Cypriot (n =100)
Gender		
Female	53 (52.5%)	54 (54%)
Male	48 (47.5%)	46 (46%)
Age Group		
18-24	5 (5%)	-
25-34	30 (29.7%)	30 (30%)
35-44	35 (34.7%)	39 (39%)
45-54	12 (11.9%)	23 (23%)
55-64	9 (8.9%)	4 (4%)
65>	10 (9.9)	4 (4%)
Education Level		
Lower than high school level	4 (4%)	5 (5%)
High school diploma or equivalent	7 (6.9%)	9 (9%)
Bachelor's degree	43 (42.6%)	42 (42%)
Master's degree	32 (31.7%)	21 (21%)
Doctorate	15 (14.9%)	23 (23%)
Income Level		
<4000 SAR/<12,000 TL	10 (9.9%)	11 (11%)
4000 - 10,000 SAR/12,100-20,000 TL	16 (15.8 %)	12 (12%)
10,000 - 15,000 SAR/20,100-30,000 TL	30 (29.7 %)	1 (1%)
15,000 - 25,000 SAR/30,100-40,000 TL	25 (24.8 %)	33 (33%)
>25,000 SAR/>40,000 TL	20 (19.8 %)	43 (43%)

Descriptive findings about marriage

Descriptive findings about marriage are presented in Table 2. 13.9% of Saudis were in polygamous unions, while all Turkish Cypriots were in monogamous marriages. Marriage duration was similar across groups, but Turkish

Cypriots were more often married for over ten years. In comparison, Saudis reported a broader range, including larger families, whereas the former had one or two children. Perceived marital quality was higher among Saudis, but response variability was greater.

Table 2. Descriptive Findings about Marriage

Type of Marriage	Saudi (n =101)	Turkish Cypriot (n =100)
Monogamous	85 (84.2 %)	100 (100%)
Polygamous	14 (13.9%)	-
Unspecified	2 (2%)	-
Duration of marriage		
1 year <	6 (5.9%)	9 (9 %)
1-3 years	19 (18.8)	8 (8%)
4-6 years	24 (23.8%)	21 (21%)
7-10 years	25 (24.8 %)	18 (18%)
10-15 years	10 (9.9%)	22 (22%)
15 years >	17 (16.8%)	22 (22%)

Number of children		
0	18 (17.8%)	22 (22%)
1	16 (15.8 %)	30 (30 %)
2	15 (14.9 %)	34 (34%)
3	15 (14.9 %)	11 (11%)
4	18 (13.9 %)	3 (3%)
5	11 (10.9 %)	-
6	8 (7.9%)	-
7	1 (1%)	-
Perceived marital quality		
Very good	29 (28.7%)	25 (25%)
Good	19 (18.8 %)	36 (36%)
Neutral	24 (23.8)	16 (16%)
Bad	23 (22.8)	16 (16%)
Very bad	6 (5.9)	7 (7%)
Mean	2.67	1.43
Sd.	1.950	1.047
Min.	0	0
Max.	7	4

Attachment and Marital Satisfaction

Table 3 illustrates that Spearman correlation analysis identified substantial negative correlations between marital satisfaction and insecure attachment. Both anxious ($r = -0.70, p < .001$) and avoidant attachment ($r = -0.56, p < .001$) were negatively correlated with marital satisfaction in the Saudi group.

Similar trends were observed in the Turkish Cypriot sample, with negative correlations for both anxious attachment ($r = -0.39, p < .001$) and avoidant attachment ($r = -0.53, p < .001$).

Table 3. Correlation of Attachment and Marital Satisfaction

Variable	Saudi Group		Turkish Cypriot Group	
	r	p	r	p
Anxious attachment	-0.688**	<.001	0.393**	<.001
Avoidant attachment	-0.564**	<.001	-0.532**	<.001

Gender and Marital Satisfaction

Correlation of gender and marital satisfaction is presented in Table 4. Mann-Whitney U tests were used to assess gender differences in marital satisfaction within each cultural group. In the Saudi sample, both males (Mdn = 3.71, n = 101) and females (Mdn = 3.71, n = 101) did not differ significantly in marital satisfaction ($U = 1235.50, p$

= 0.804). Similarly, among Turkish Cypriot participants, no significant difference was observed between males (Mdn = 4.93, n = 100) and females (Mdn = 4.86, n = 100), with $U = 1235.50$ and $p = 0.964$. These findings suggest that there is no gender-based differences in marital satisfaction in either group.

Table 4. Correlation of Gender and Marital Satisfaction

Variable	Saudi Group			Turkish Cypriot Group		
	Male	Female	p	Male	Female	p
	Mdn			Mdn		
Marital satisfaction	3.71	3.71	0.804	4.93	4.86	.964

Marriage Type and Marital Satisfaction

Marriage type and marital satisfaction levels among Saudi participants are presented in Table 5. The results revealed that participants in polygamous marriages (Mdn = 2.50, n

= 101) had lower levels of marital satisfaction than participants in monogamous marriages (Mdn = 4.14, n = 101), $U = 234$, $z = -3.629$, $p < .001$, $r = -36.47$.

Table 5. Differences between Marriage Type and Marital Satisfaction

Variable	Monogamy	Pologamy	P
	Mdn	Mdn	
	4.14	2.50	<.001

Discussion

This study examined how sociocultural factors and attachment styles affected marital satisfaction in Saudi and Turkish Cypriot couples. In line with Rashidi Fakari et al. (2022), sociocultural factors emerged as significant predictors of marital satisfaction. Nevertheless, only the number of children and insecure attachment levels predicted marital satisfaction across both groups. In Saudi Arabia, gender roles and marital structure were impactful, and polygamous unions correlated negatively with marital satisfaction. In contrast to previous research (Kaba & Güngör, 2024), no gender-based disparities in attachment styles or marital satisfaction were observed, consistent with the findings of Momeni et al. (2022). In Saudi Arabia, traditional gender roles were more common, and couples who adhered to them reported lower levels of marital satisfaction. These roles are deeply embedded in Saudi culture, unlike the more equal roles seen in Northern Cyprus (Yucel & Koydemir, 2015). Research also revealed a notable link between family size and marital satisfaction, with larger families experiencing lower satisfaction (Kowal et al., 2021). Furthermore, polygamy was associated with lower marital satisfaction among Saudi participants, aligning with previous studies (Sinai & Peleg, 2020).

Attachment styles were found to be significantly correlated with marital satisfaction. Higher levels of insecure attachment were associated with lower marital satisfaction, whereas secure attachment was associated with higher satisfaction (Kamel Abbasi et al., 2016). No significant differences in secure attachment levels were observed between the two groups, which aligns with findings from cross-cultural studies (McLeod, 2024). The influence of insecure attachment on marital satisfaction, however, varied between groups. Avoidant attachment had a more substantial negative effect on marital satisfaction among Turkish Cypriots, while both types of insecure attachment notably impacted Saudi participants.

Conclusion

This study explores the relationship between sociocultural characteristics, attachment styles, and marital satisfaction among married couples from North Cyprus and Saudi Arabia. The findings indicate that a higher percentage of Turkish Cypriots (61%) rate their marriage as good or very good compared to Saudi respondents (48%). Additionally, the study shows that higher levels of insecure attachment are associated with lower marital satisfaction. There is no significant difference in marital satisfaction based on sex in either group. Finally, the research reveals that marital satisfaction is lower in polygamous marriages.

Recommendations

The current study found that secure attachment is a key factor influencing marital satisfaction. Therefore, it is crucial to create environments that foster secure attachments between children and their caregivers from an early age. Clinical practitioners should assist their clients in adapting to the changes that occur during the prenatal and postnatal periods, helping them adjust to new parental roles and respond effectively to their babies' needs. Additionally, raising public awareness through various media channels can help reach a broader audience. On the other hand, the decline in marital satisfaction with increasing numbers of children highlights the importance of effective family planning. Providing services such as complimentary premarital counselling before marriage has been shown to help establish a harmonious relationship between couples. Finally, it is recommended to organize family education programs through collaborative efforts between school guidance units and social services.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the sample size was restricted to 201 participants, which may have affected the results and limited the generalizability of the findings to larger populations. Second, the gender distribution was slightly imbalanced, with 53% female and 47% male participants. This imbalance may have arisen partly because the researchers' gender made it easier to access female participants. Third, the data were collected through online platforms, potentially increasing social desirability bias when measuring cultural effects. Fourth, the small number of participants in polygamous marriages, particularly among Saudi participants, limits the generalizability of the results regarding the impact of polygamy on marital satisfaction. Lastly, it was assumed that participants responded honestly and accurately to the questionnaire items, genuinely reflecting their thoughts and experiences.

Declarations**Ethics Committee Approval**

Ethical approval was obtained from the Scientific Research Ethics Committee of Cyprus International University (EKK23-24/01/004). Before their participation, all participants were provided with and approved informed consent forms.

Consent for Publication

Not applicable.

Availability for Data and Materials

Not applicable.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests in this manuscript.

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Authors' Contributions

This Research was a part of the first author's master's thesis. The second author was responsible for the study design and supervision. The first author contributed to data collection, follow-up, analysis, manuscript drafting, critical revision of the article, and provided technical and material support. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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