

The Relationship Between Perceived Parental Attitude and Life Satisfaction Among University Students

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Abstract

Introduction. The effect of parental attitudes and behaviors in raising their children on the individual's life has been the subject of numerous studies for many years. There is a strong correlation between parental attitudes and the child's ability to be satisfied with life.

The objective of the research was to determine the relationships between perceived parental attitudes (overprotection, rejection, emotional warmth) and life satisfaction among university students. We investigated whether parental attitudes play a role in predicting life satisfaction among university students, and what role they play.

Materials and Methods. The study was conducted from June 2020 to September 2020. Data were collected using Google Forms. Each person consented to anonymously participate in the study and was informed about the objectives of the study being a descriptive one. The population of the study consisted of nursing students enrolled in the Faculty of Health Sciences. For this purpose, 220 students at the age of 20 to 30 years participated in the study. The assessment battery consisted of Student Demographic Form, the Short-Egna Minnen Beträffande Uppfostran (Own Memories of Upbringing), and the Life Satisfaction Scale.

Results. There was a significant negative correlation between maternal rejection and life satisfaction among the students. Male students were more likely to perceive their fathers as being disapproving than female students did. These findings were discussed in line with the studies in the related literature.

Conclusions. High life satisfaction is a variable that protects young people from risk factors. Therefore, a focus should be placed on increasing life satisfaction among students. Parental attitude is an effective factor for life satisfaction among students. For this reason, it can be said that it would be beneficial to inform families about appropriate parental attitudes to increase their children's life satisfaction.

Keywords

Parenting Styles; Life Satisfaction; University Student

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Problem statement and analysis of the latest research

Life satisfaction involves the cognitive evaluation of one's level of satisfaction in various areas of life and indicates that a person has lived their life well and is satisfied. According to Dem *et al.* (2016), individuals feel satisfaction when a desire, wish, purpose, or need in their lives are fulfilled [1]. Life satisfaction is a very important factor for individuals to be satisfied with their lives and live a meaningful life. This concept does not refer to a specific aspect of individuals' lives,

but to all dimensions [2].

Neugarten (1961), who proposed five criteria to determine life satisfaction among individuals, described people with high life satisfaction as follows:

- Enjoy the daily activities of their lives;
- Believe that their life has meaning by accepting their past experiences and having goals regarding their life;
- Have the belief that they have achieved the goals they have set in their life;
- Have a positive sense of self and feel worthwhile;

- Have a positive attitude towards life in general [3].

The concept of life satisfaction in young people is influenced by many different factors. Some of them can be listed as the meaning individuals attribute to their lives, the pleasure they derive from their daily lives, the degree to which they achieve their goals, liking their own bodies, having a positive individual identity, socioeconomic status, personal security and social and family relationships [4]. It can be said that one of the most important factors affecting life satisfaction is family relationships [5]. We can see that children who grow up in a family environment, where the relationships between family members are healthy, where there is unconditional love and respect, and where they have the opportunity to develop their talents and self-actualization, feel good and have high life satisfaction. At this point, the parents' attitude towards their children becomes more important.

In the literature, parents' attitudes/behaviors toward their children are classified in different ways. In this study, perceived rejection, emotional warmth, and overprotective parental attitudes, which are three sub-dimensions of the Short-Egna Minnen Beträffande Uppfostran (S-EMBU - Own Memories of Upbringing), were discussed [6]. For this reason, explanations of these perceived parental attitudes are provided below.

Rejection

Parental disapproval generally refers to behaviors such as disapproval, criticism, arbitrary rebuke, or punishment and indicates a lack of warmth, emotional connection, interest, support, and love [7].

Overprotection

Parental overprotection has been defined as protective behavior by parents that is excessive, considering the child's developmental level [8, 9]. Parents with overprotective behavior are characterized by acting like a baby to their children for long periods of time, having excessive contact, being very controlling, having trouble separating from the child, not encouraging independent behavior, being overly controlling, as well as by excessive physical or social communication and excessive anxiety [10, 11].

Emotional Warmth

Emotional warmth has been linked to "the quality of loving relationships between parents and their children and physical and verbal behaviors parents use to express those feelings." Authoritarian parenting behaviors, where parental warmth and control are high, are considered the most effective parenting type [12, 13].

There have been several studies that examined the relationship between parental attitudes and life satisfaction. In the study conducted by Coccia *et al.*, a positive significant relationship was found between high life satisfaction, parental tolerance, and low stress levels [14]. In the study conducted by Deniz *et al.* (2013) with 414 participants, democratic parental attitudes and subjective well-being and life satisfaction were

found to be positively significant; there was a significant negative relationship between protective and authoritarian parental attitudes and subjective well-being and life satisfaction [15]. In the study conducted by Ozkan (2014) with 659 participants, it was found that subjective well-being of participants who perceived their parents as democratic and tolerant ones was higher as compared to those who perceived their parents as being neglectful and authoritarian [16]. According to the results of the study carried out by Abubakar *et al.* (2015) with 500 adolescents, children who experienced inconsistent parenting styles were found to be more likely to have lower life satisfaction [17]. According to the results of the study conducted by Abdi *et al.* (2015) with 500 university students, it was found that students who perceived their parents as being authoritarian had higher academic achievement and life satisfaction [18]. Xie *et al.* (2016) in their study involving 718 participants found that among the three parenting styles, authoritarian parenting was most strongly associated with life satisfaction [19]. As a result of the study involving 325 children carried out by Gherasim *et al.* (2017), children who perceived their mothers as more authoritarian ones were found to have higher life satisfaction and lower levels of depressive symptoms [20]. According to the study conducted by Pérez-Fuentes *et al.* (2019) with 742 adolescents, a relationship was found between different dimensions of parenting practices and life satisfaction. Specifically, the higher the score on the variables of affect and communication, promotion of autonomy, humor, and self-disclosure, the higher the life satisfaction [21]. The results of the study conducted by Diaz (2020) with 2,373 adolescents revealed that individuals formed emotional bonds, expressed their opinions, feelings, and behaviors without being judged by their parents, there were no conflicts, they were accepted by their parents, and living in a tolerant family environment increased their life satisfaction [22]. Lavrič *et al.* (2020) carried out a study with 10,898 participants at the age of 14-29 years and identified a lack of authoritative parental education as the most important factor for lower life satisfaction in young people [23].

According to the results of the study, which examined the relationships between parental attitudes and life satisfaction, individuals who perceived their parents as being accepting, supportive, and tolerant were found to have higher life satisfaction.

The objective of this research was to determine the relationships between perceived parental attitudes and life satisfaction among individuals.

Materials and Methods

Design, Setting, and Sample

The research is a descriptive study. The population of the study consisted of nursing students enrolled in the Faculty of Health Sciences. No sampling method was used in the study and the students who volunteered to participate in the study were included in the study (completeness).

Data were collected using Google Forms. Data collection

instruments used were the Personal Information Form with socio-demographic characteristics, the S-EMBU and the Life Satisfaction Scale (LSS).

Personal Information Form

The personal information form prepared by the researchers consisted of 14 questions regarding the socio-demographic characteristics and introductory characteristics of the students.

Short-Egna Minnen Beträffande Uppfostran (Own Memories of Upbringing)

Parents’ self-directed behavior as children assesses their perceptions about their forms. It consists of 23 items and is the short form of the original 81-item version. The S-EMBU includes three subscales: rejection, emotional warmth, and overprotection. The items are scored separately for mothers and fathers on a 4-point Likert-type scale. For this scale, parents answer attitude items separately using a 4-point rating (1 = never, 4 = most of the time). The scale was adapted into Turkish by Karancı *et al.* (2006). It consists of 7 (2, 6, 9, 12, 14, 19, and 23 for maternal and paternal attitudes) items for the *emotional warmth* subdimension; 9 (3, 5, 8, 10, 11, 17, 18, 20, and 22) items for the *overprotection* subdimension; 7 (1, 4, 7, 13, 15, 16, and 21) items for the *rejection* subdimension. Of the items in the scale, only the 17th item is reverse coded (1 = 4, 2 = 3, 3 = 2, 4 = 1) as in the original study and included in the analysis. The same three dimensions emerge in the study. The alpha coefficients for maternal rejection, emotional warmth, and overprotection are 0.80, 0.76, and 0.76, respectively, and the alpha coefficients for paternal rejection, emotional warmth, and overprotection are 0.82, 0.79, and 0.79, respectively [24–28].

Life Satisfaction Scale

The LSS developed by Diener *et al.* (1985) consists of 5 items and is a 7-point Likert-type scale [4]. The original reliability of the scale is Cronbach’s alpha = 0.87. It was adapted into Turkish by Köker and Yetim (1991) [29]. The LSS is a 5-point Likert-type scale consisting of 5 items, with the highest score of 25 and the lowest score of 5 - definitely disagree, disagree, partially agree, agree, absolutely agree. The reliability of the scale was found to be Cronbach’s alpha = 0.86. The validity of the scale is 0.82. The Cronbach’s alpha internal consistency coefficient of the study was found to be 0.86.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the study were assessed by the SPSS 25.0 program. The number, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used as descriptive statistics. The assumption of data normality was assessed by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The Mann-Whitney U test was used for data of two groups which did not show normal distribution, and the Kruskal-Wallis H test was used for more than two groups. Mann-Whitney U analysis was used to determine the origin of the differences among more than two groups. The correlation

between the variables was assessed by Spearman’s correlation analysis. Significance level was taken as 0.05.

Results

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants and Their Parents

The present study was carried out with 220 (154 females and 66 males) participants at the age of 20 to 30 years (M = 22.11, SD = 1.51). Demographic information is listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of participants and their parents.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	66	30
Female	154	70
Age (years) 20 - 30 years (M = 22.11, SD = 1.51)		
Marital status of parents		
Married	210	95.4
Divorced	10	4.6
Living style		
With parents	36	16.4
Other (with friends, relatives, or alone)	184	83.6
Place of residence		
Village	34	15.5
District	68	30.9
City	80	36.4
Metropolis	38	17.3
Mother’s education		
Illiterate	80	36.4
Primary school	82	37.3
Secondary school	38	17.3
High school	18	8.2
University	2	0.9
Father’s education		
Illiterate	22	10
Primary school	78	35.5
Secondary school	48	21.8
High school	50	22.7
University	22	10
Health problem		
Yes	28	12.7
No	192	87.3

Descriptive Information for the Measures

In order to examine the descriptive characteristics of the measure means, for both mother and father, standard deviations, the min-max ranges were provided for the S-EMBU with sub-

scales of emotional warmth, overprotection and rejection, and the LSS (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive information for the measures.

Measures	N	Mean	SD	Min – Max Values
EMBU				
Mother				
Emotional warmth	220	19.52	4.04	11 – 28
Overprotection	220	21.90	4.24	11 – 31
Rejection	220	10.62	3.43	7 – 22
Father				
Emotional warmth	220	18.43	3.95	7 – 27
Overprotection	220	21.14	4.45	9 – 31
Rejection	220	10.96	4.01	7 – 24
LSS	220	18.26	5.35	5 – 25

When we look at the average values, it can be seen that the group mostly perceived overprotection from their mothers. The mean LSS score was found to be 18.26 ± 5.35 .

Reliability Analysis of Scales

The S-EMBU scale was examined for subscales of rejection, overprotection and emotional warmth for maternal and paternal responses differently. The results obtained when applying the reliability analysis are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Reliability analysis of scales.

	Cronbach's Alfa	Item number
S-EMBU		
Mother - Emotional warmth	0.68	7
Mother - Overprotection	0.55	9
Mother - Rejection	0.64	7
Father - Emotional warmth	0.66	7
Father - Overprotection	0.56	9
Father - Rejection	0.71	7
LSS	0.82	5

Regarding parent’s gender, marital status, and lifestyle, no significant difference was found in the attitudinal subscales of perceived maternal warmth, overprotection, and rejection of participants (Table 4, $p > 0.05$). According to the EMBU subscales, the mean scores for paternal rejection were significantly higher for male participants as compared to female participants ($p < 0.01$). The mean scores of the S-EMBU sub-dimensions of emotionally warm father in participants whose parents were married were found to be significantly higher as compared to those whose parents were divorced ($p < 0.01$). No significant difference was found in the emotional warmth, overprotective, and rejection subscales in relation to whether

the participants lived with or separated from their family, and the maternal and paternal educational level ($p > 0.05$).

Correlation Coefficients Between Variables Examined in the Present Study

In order to investigate the relationships between subscales of the S-EMBU, including emotional warmth, overprotection and rejection for both mother and father, LSS Spearman’s correlation analyses were performed.

According to the results of correlation analysis (Table 5), there was a significant negative correlation between the LSS and perceived maternal rejection ($r = -0.195, p < 0.01$). According to the results for perceived maternal parenting styles, maternal emotional warmth revealed positive correlations with maternal overprotection ($r = 0.203, p < 0.01$), maternal rejection ($r = 0.171, p < 0.01$) and paternal emotional warmth ($r = 0.722, p < 0.01$). Secondly, maternal overprotection was positively associated with maternal rejection ($r = 0.294, p < 0.01$), paternal emotional warmth ($r = 0.154, p < 0.05$), paternal overprotection ($r = 0.731, p < 0.05$) and paternal rejection ($r = 0.153, p < 0.05$). Finally, maternal rejection was positively correlated with paternal emotional warmth ($r = 0.156, p < 0.01$), paternal overprotection ($r = 0.200, p < 0.01$) and paternal rejection ($r = 0.400, p < 0.01$). According to the results for perceived paternal parenting styles, paternal overprotection was positively correlated with paternal rejection ($r = 0.310, p < 0.01$) (Table 5).

Discussion

Numerous studies have demonstrated that family relationships have a significant impact on life satisfaction among young people. Young people with high life satisfaction have been found to have more positive relationships with their parents.

According to our results, no significant difference was found in the attitudinal subscales of perceived maternal emotional warmth, overprotection, and rejection in relation to gender, maternal and paternal education, and lifestyle. In our study, the mean scores of maternal emotional warmth in the S-EMBU subscales of female participants were not significantly different as compared to male participants, while the mean scores of paternal rejection were significantly higher in the EMBU subscales of male participants as compared to female participants. In parallel with our study, Buschgens *et al.* (2010) reported that male adolescents perceived their parents as more rejecting than girls did [30]. Similarly, in another study, males perceived their fathers as more rejecting than daughters did. In the same study, girls perceived their fathers as emotionally warmer but reported being more cared for by their mothers than boys [31]. According to the results of another study conducted with university students, male students perceived their parents as more rejecting than female students did [32]. Conversely, in another study conducted with adolescents, girls were found to perceive their parents as more disapproving and overprotective than boys did [33–35].

Table 4. Differences of demographic variables in perceived parenting styles.

	M - Emotional warmth Mean ± SD		M - Overprotection Mean ± SD		M - Rejection Mean ± SD	
Gender						
Male (n = 66)	19.06 ± 4.23	Z: -1.14	21.42 ± 4.38	Z: -1.323	10.63 ± 3.56	Z: -0.154
Female (n = 154)	19.72 ± 3.96	p = 0.254	22.11 ± 4.17	p = 0.186	10.62 ± 3.38	p = 0.877
Marital status of parents						
Married (n = 210)	19.51 ± 4.05	Z: -0.275	21.81 ± 4.27	Z: -1.511	10.56 ± 3.46	Z: -1.871
Divorced (n = 10)	19.80 ± 4.07	p = 0.783	23.80 ± 3.08	p = 0.131	12.00 ± 2.30	p = 0.061
Living style						
With parents (n = 38)	19.78 ± 3.74	Z: 1.541	22.00 ± 4.95	Z: 0.680	10.42 ± 2.94	Z: 0.582
Other (with friends, relatives, or alone) (n = 182)	19.47 ± 4.11	p = 0.215	21.89 ± 4.09	p = 0.409	10.67 ± 3.53	p = 0.445

	F - Emotional warmth Mean ± SD		F - Overprotection Mean ± SD		F - Rejection Mean ± SD	
Gender						
Male (n = 66)	17.66 ± 4.20	Z: -0.1809	20.81 ± 4.44	Z: -0.723	12.00 ± 3.81	Z: 3.428
Female (n = 154)	18.76 ± 3.81	p = 0.070	21.28 ± 4.47	p = 0.469	10.51 ± 4.02	p = 0.001**
Marital status of parents						
Married (n = 210)	18.69 ± 3.69	Z: -2.939	21.19 ± 4.35	Z: -0.112	10.60 ± 4.06	Z: 0.464
Divorced (n = 10)	13.00 ± 5.45	p = 0.003**	20.20 ± 6.51	p = 0.911	11.00 ± 2.98	p = 0.643
Living Style						
With parents (n = 38)	18.15 ± 4.58	Z: -0.624	21.00 ± 4.84	Z: -0.141	10.42 ± 2.94	Z: 1.255
Other (with friends, relatives, or alone) (n = 182)	18.49 ± 3.82	p = 0.533	21.17 ± 4.38	p = 0.533	10.67 ± 3.53	p = 0.210

Notes: ** - p < 0.01

Table 5. Spearman’s correlations between study measures.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
(1) LSS	1	0.104	-0.026	-0.195**	0.008	-0.106	-0.135
(2) Mother’s emotional warmth		1	0.203**	0.171**	0.722**	0.031	-0.018
(3) Mother’s overprotection			1	0.294**	0.154*	0.731**	0.153*
(4) Mother’s rejection				1	0.156*	0.200**	0.400**
(5) Father’s emotional warmth					1	0.115	-0.110
(6) Father’s overprotection						1	0.310**
(7) Father’s rejection							1

Notes: * - p < 0.05, ** - p < 0.01

According to the literature, fathers adopt a distant and disapproving attitude in the relationships with their sons due to the influence of gender roles. The results of our study are consistent with the literature.

There was no statistically significant difference in parental attitude depending on the level of education. Several studies have shown that parental education had an impact on maternal and paternal attitudes. Studies have shown that students perceived parental attitudes as democratic when maternal and paternal education levels increased, and they perceived parental attitudes as more authoritarian when their education levels decreased [36–38]. Duncan *et al.* (1994) found that there was a positive relationship between parents’ educational level and parental warmth. However, inadequate parental education

was reported to have a negative impact on the quality of child rearing [35, 38, 39]. For example, a study conducted by McCarthy *et al.* (2016) reported that mothers with low levels of education used more physical and psychological punishment on their children [40]. The inconsistency of the study findings with the literature can be explained by the fact that parental educational level in the present sample was primary school.

No significant difference was found in the subscales of emotional warmth, overprotection and rejection attitude in relation to living with family, or separation of the participants. The fact that the results of the present study are not consistent with the literature is probably due to the fact that only a small proportion of the sample lived with their families. A study conducted by Demirsu (2018) found that the mean score of

emotional warmth subdimensions was significantly higher in students living with their family as compared to those not living with family [41]. The hypothesis is that individuals living with their family receive more emotional closeness and support from their parents than those who do not live with their family. The mean score of perceived emotional warmth from the father was significantly higher among participants whose parents were married as compared to participants whose parents were divorced. However, the interpretation of this result may not be reliable as the majority of parents in the current sample were married.

According to the results of correlation analysis, a significant negative relationship was found between the LSS and perceived maternal rejection. Individuals' life satisfaction decreased when the level of mother's rejection increased. In other words, life satisfaction decreased when the level of democratic attitude decreased [42]. Family relationships are based on love, respect and trust; the healthiest parental attitude is one that values, trusts and respects the child, where the child is accepted, the child is involved in the rules and decisions. Studies have shown that the better the relationships with the mother, the more satisfied people are with their lives. In other words, it has been observed that people who are in healthy and positive communication with their mother have higher life satisfaction [42–44].

Conclusions

The results of this study showed that the parenting model does indeed affect students' life satisfaction. Warmer, less rejecting, and less punitive parents raise children who are happier, more emotionally stable, more hopeful about the future, and have higher life satisfaction, but future studies will accept more conclusive evidence.

Limitations

The present study has methodological limitations. The study was conducted with a total number of 235 participants. However, due to missing items and outliers, the analyses were conducted with 220 participants. Although the sample size was sufficient for statistical analyses, further studies can be conducted with a larger sample size. The possibility of similar response bias exists with the S-EMBU scale, which measures perceived parenting style in childhood. Additionally, as participants transition to adulthood with increasing family conflict and desire for independence, they may have negative attitudes toward parents. Therefore, longitudinal studies are suggested to observe the long-term effects of early experiences.

Despite the summary limitations, this study aimed to understand the dynamic structure of early experiences and their inevitable effects on functioning in adulthood. Future research would benefit from expanding the study to a large population.

Ethical Statement

The study was conducted between June 2020 - September 2020 with the consent of the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences.

Informed Consent

Each individual consented to anonymous participation in the study and was informed of its objectives.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that no conflicts exist.

Financial Disclosure

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