THE EFFECT OF GENDER ROLE ATTITUDES ON THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN AND CHILD GENDER PREFERENCE

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Abstract

Fertility is a biological phenomenon for reproduction, yet it is influenced by cultural and social values. Therefore, to examine health problems related to high fertility in a society, it is necessary to determine the fertility-related behaviors and attitudes of that society. This research was conducted to determine the effect of gender roles attitude on the number of children and child gender preference. The sample of this descriptive study consisted of 101 women who were born and had spent most of their life in Şanlıurfa, who were married and had not yet reached menopause were included in the study. The data were collected by face-to-face interview method through the Data Collection Form and the Gender Roles Attitude Scale. In the study, in terms of gender roles, 8.9% of women had a traditionalist and 91.1% of them had an egalitarian attitude. Also, it was determined that socio-cultural factors such as education, working status, family type and ethnicity affect women's attitudes towards gender role, while gender roles attitudes have an effect on the number of children and gender preferences. According to the research findings, women with traditionalist gender role attitudes had higher number of children and preference for male children.

Keywords: Gender roles attitude, traditionalist attitude, egalitarian attitude, number of children, child gender preference.

TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYET ROLLERİ TUTUMLARININ ÇOCUK SAYISINA VE ÇOCUK CİNSİYETİ TERCİHİNE ETKİSİ

Öz

Doğurganlık, üremeye yönelik biyolojik bir olay olmakla birlikte, kültürel ve sosyal değerlerden etkilenmektedir. Bu nedenle, yüksek doğurganlığa bağlı sağlık sorunlarının kontrol edilebilmesi için o toplumdaki doğurganlıkla ilgili davranış ve tutumların belirlenmesi gerekmektedir. Bu araştırma, toplumsal cinsiyet roller tutumunun çocuk sayısına ve çocuk cinsiyeti tercihine etkisini belirlemek amacıyla yapılmıştır. Tanımlayıcı tipte olan çalışmanın örneklemini, Şanlıurfa'da doğmuş ve yaşamının büyük bir bölümünü Şanlıurfa'da geçirmiş, evli ve henüz menopoza girmemiş 101 kadın oluşturmuştur. Araştırmanın verileri, Veri Toplama Formu ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet Rolleri Tutum Ölçeği kullanılarak yüz yüze görüşme yöntemi ile toplanmıştır. Araştırmada, cinsiyet rolleri açısından kadınların %8,9'unun gelenekselci, %91,1'inin eşitlikçi bir tutuma sahip olduğu belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca, eğitim, çalışma durumu, aile tipi ve etnik köken gibi sosyo-kültürel faktörlerin kadınların cinsiyet rolüne yönelik tutumlarını etkilediği, cinsiyet rolleri tutumlarının ise çocuk sayısı ve çocuğun cinsiyetine yönelik tercihleri üzerinde etkili olduğu belirlenmiştir. Araştırma bulgularına göre, gelenekselci cinsiyet rolü tutumlarına sahip kadınların çocuk sayısı ve erkek çocuk tercihi daha fazladır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri tutumu, gelenekselci tutum, eşitlikçi tutum, çocuk sayısı, çocuk cinsiyetine yönelik tercih.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender discrimination is a phenomenon that has existed in almost every society in the historical process and continues to exist in the present day. This discrimination stems from the transformation of natural and biological differences into social differences over time and the definition of separate roles for men and women. Roles imposed on women includes responsibilities such as taking care of their spouse and children, providing their basic needs, taking care of the routine chores of the house such as cleaning, ironing and cooking, determining the needs of the house, and self-sacrificing for the comfort and happiness of the family. The roles imposed on men include responsibilities such as earning money, managing monetary resources, protecting the family, deciding on important matters and becoming the head of the house (1). This understanding, which gives the women the role of the housewife and men the role of the provider, is defined as "traditional gender roles". Contrary to the traditional understanding of gender roles, the understanding of "egalitarian gender roles" attributes equal roles, duties and responsibilities to men and women within the family (2).

These roles that are imposed on men and women in most areas of social life create discrimination against women and often cause women to remain in the background positions and give more value to men than women (3). Besides, it also prevents women from making decisions on issues that affect their lives such as education, marriage, and employment, and act on them (4).

Along with the developments such as women entering the workforce and having higher levels of education, roles imposed on women have started to decrease, and men have started to share them. Therefore, it is observed that the roles and responsibilities imposed on women and men in the family have changed, and relatively more egalitarian attitudes are displayed in terms of gender roles, especially in the younger generation, and more traditional gender roles are adopted by older individuals (5,6).

While economic, political and social changes cause remarkable changes in the roles of men and women in patriarchal families as well, traditional attitudes to gender roles still have a big impact. According to this perspective, the reasons for women's existence in society are largely shaped by their reproductive potential (7). In such societies, it is believed that childbearing, and especially bearing male children, is for the benefit of the women and is an element that increases their status. Especially in traditional societies, individuals desire a high number of male children, as they will be the ones who will carry on the family's lineage and take care of their parents in old age (8). This situation suggests that the desire and effort to have male children can be an important factor among the reasons for high fertility rates.

Şanlıurfa, located in Southeastern Anatolia in Turkey, is the city with the highest fertility rate, with a population committed to the traditional eastern culture. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute's data for 2022, while the average fertility rate of Turkey was 1.62, it was 3.59 for Şanlıurfa. While the approximate birth rate was 12.2 per thousand in Turkey, it was 27.3 per thousand in Şanlıurfa (9). Due to the high fertility, maternal and infant mortality rates are higher than the country's average (10). Şanlıurfa is also a province where gender inequality is evident, and women's participation in education and workforce is low. In the gender equality report of 2020, the city ranked 70th among 81 provinces in gender inequality and was among the top 11 provinces where women have the least power (11).

It is important to identify fertility-related behaviors and attitudes in the society in order to identify and control health problems related to high fertility.

This research was conducted to determine the effect of gender attitudes on the number of children and child gender preference.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Setting and Sample

The study population consisted of married women who have not yet reached menopause, living around Family Health Center (FHC) region in Şanlıurfa. Women who were born and had spent most of their life in Şanlıurfa, who were married and had not yet reached menopause were included in the study.

In order to calculate the sample size, a pilot study was conducted with 53 women who applied to FHC between July 6-7, 2020. Gender Roles Attitude Scale scores of those who preferred male children and those who did not were calculated. Mean score and standard deviations were calculated as 104.8±239, 129.1±22.0, respectively, and with 1.05 effect size, 95% power, and 95% trust levels, the number of participants in each group was calculated to be at least 21. G-power statistics program was used in sample size calculation.

The fieldwork of the research was carried out between July 13-22, 2020.

As the distribution of those who preferred male children was less in the community, it took longer to reach the minimum number. Until the minimum number of participants who preferred male children was achieved, participants who did not have a preference for male children were not ignored and included in the groups The research was completed with a total of 101 women, 22 of whom had a gender preference and 79 of whom had no preference.

2.2. The Ethical Dimension of the Research

To conduct the research, written approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Harran University (dated 24.02.2020, no. HRÜ/20.04.16), and informed consent was obtained from the women participating in the research and the author of the scale used in data collection.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

The data were collected by face-to-face interview method through the Data Collection Form and the Gender Roles Attitude Scale.

Data Collection Form consisted of 10 questions about women's socio-demographic characteristics (age, education level, perceived economic situation, employment status, the language spoken at home the most, family type) and their characteristics in terms of their child preferences (the number of children they desired to have, the number of male children they desired to have).

Gender Roles Attitude Scale (GRAS): This is a scale developed by Zeyneloğlu (2008) that determines the attitudes of individuals towards gender roles. Comprising of a total of 38 items, GRAS is scored between 0-5. The scale is scored according to how much the participants agreed with the statements regarding egalitarian gender roles, strongly agree being 5 points, agree 4 points, undecided 3, disagree 2, and strongly disagree 1 point. On the other hand, the statements regarding traditional gender role attitudes are scored based on how much the participants disagreed with the statement; strongly agree being 1 point, agree 2 points, undecided 3 points, disagree 4 points, and strongly disagree 5 points. The highest score that can be obtained with this scoring method is 190, and the lowest score is 38. The highest value obtained from the scale indicates that the individual has an egalitarian attitude towards gender roles, and the lowest value indicates that the individual has a traditional attitude towards gender roles. Thus, those who score 95 and above are considered to have an egalitarian attitude towards gender roles, and those who score below 95 are considered to have a traditional attitude towards gender roles. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the Gender Roles Attitude Scale was found to be 0.92 for the 38 items in the scale. This result shows that scale items have high internal consistency and high reliability (12).

2.4. Variables

The dependent variable of the research is the desired number of children and child gender preference.

Socio-demographic characteristics and Gender Roles Attitude Scale scores are independent variables of the study.

The preference for male children is the state when women sustain their fertility even though they have already achieved the number of children they desire.

2.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows 16.0 statistical package program. In the evaluation of the data, descriptive statistics, Chi-square, t-test, one-way analysis of variance and Pearson correlation analysis were used. The findings were interpreted at a significance level of 0.05 with 95% confidence interval.

3. RESULTS

The mean age of women was 31.5 ± 8.0, and 33.6% of them did not complete their basic education and did not graduate from any school. 88.1% of women did not work in any income-generating job, and 51.5% of them perceived their income level as insufficient/very inadequate. 77.2% of the women lived in nuclear families, and 52.5% of them spoke a language other than Turkish at home (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of Some Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Women

Characteristics	Number	%
Educational Background		
Illiterate	33	32.7
Literate	11	10.9
Primary school	32	31.7
Secondary school	9	8.9
High school	6	5.9
Undergraduate degree or higher	10	9.9
Employment Status		
Employed	12	11.9
Unemployed	89	88.1
Perceived Income Level		
Sufficient	23	22.8
Moderate	26	25.7
Insufficient	47	46.5
Extremely insufficient	5	5.0
The Language Spoken the Most at Home		
Turkish	48	47.5
Arabic	32	31.7
Kurdish	21	20.8
Family Type		
Nuclear family	78	77.2
Extended family	23	22.8
Total	**101**	**100.0**

In terms of gender roles, 8.9% of women had a traditionalist and 91.1% of them had an egalitarian attitude.

GRAS scores of women who were employed and lived in a nuclear family were higher than women who were unemployed and lived in an extended family (p <0.05) (Table 2). Women who were unemployed and lived in an extended family had more traditional attitudes in terms of gender roles.

Table 2. Distribution of Some Characteristics of Women According to Gender Roles Attitude Scale-1

Characteristics						
			Total Scale Score			
		n	**Mean±SD**	**t**	**p**	
Employment Status	Employed	12	138.9 ± 26.7	2.691	**0.008**	
	Unemployed	89	121.6 ± 20.0			
Family Type	Nuclear family	78	126.7 ± 20.0	2.730	**0.007**	
	Extended Family	23	113.2 ± 23.5			

GRAS scores of women who had university-level education were higher than those of women who had secondary education and women without education, and the scores of women with secondary education were higher than women without education. There was no difference between GRAS scores of women according to their income level. GRAS scores of women who spoke Turkish the most at home were higher than those who spoke Kurdish and Arabic the most, and the scores of women who spoke Kurdish the most were higher than Arabic-speaking women (p <0.05) (Table 3). Women who did not receive education and spoke Arabic the most at home had a more traditional attitude in terms of gender roles.

Table 3. Distribution of Some Characteristics of Women According to Gender Roles Attitude Scale-2

Characteristics			**Total Scale Score**		
		n	**Mean±SD**	**F**	**p**
Educational Background	Uneducated*	44	111.0 ± 19.8		
	Secondary education*	47	129.2 ± 15.4	28.514	**<0.001**
	Undergraduate education*	10	153.0 ± 12.2		
Income Level	Sufficient	23	131.7 ± 16.5		
	Moderate	26	123.8 ± 20.6	2.426	0.094
	Insufficient	52	120.0 ± 23.1		
Household Language	Turkish*	48	135.6 ± 18.2		
	Arabic*	32	110.2 ± 17.7	20.616	**<0.001**
	Kurdish*	21	116.8 ± 19.0		

* The group that makes a difference

The average number of children women desired to have was 4.6 ± 1.8, and there was a significant negative correlation between the number of children that women wanted to have and their GRAS scores (r: -0.509 <p: 0.001). As their GRAS scores increased, the number of children they wanted to have decreased. Also, 21.8% of the women indicated that they would keep having children until they had a male child, even though they had already reached the number of children they desired to have.

Women who desired to have five children or more and women who preferred male children had a more traditionalist attitude regarding gender roles compared to women who desired to have four children or less and women who especially preferred male children (p<0.05)(Table 4).

Table 4. Distribution of Gender Roles Attitude of Women According to Preference of Male Children

| | Gender Roles Attitude | | | | | |
| | Traditionalist | | Egalitarian | | | |
	Number	%*	Number	%*	X²	p
Total Number of Children Participants Desired to Have						
4 and less	2	22.2	58	63.0	*	**0.029**
5 and more	7	77.8	34	37.0		
Preference of Male Children						
Yes	5	55.6	17	18.5	**6.615**	**0.022**
No	4	44.4	75	81.5		

*Fisher's Exact test

4. DISCUSSION

According to research results, it was determined that the education level and economic status of women in the region were low and most of them were unemployed. Education, employment and economy are the most important components that determine the status of women in society, increase their power and ensure gender equality (13). From this point of view, it can be claimed that women in this region are a disadvantaged group in terms of gender equality. The fact that Şanlıurfa ranked 75th in gender inequality among all 81 provinces, and that it ranked 70th among provinces in which women have the least power in the 2020 gender equality report support this claim (11).

According to research conducted in Southeastern Anatolia, where Şanlıurfa is also located, the region has a traditionalist social structure, with the authority lying in the hands of men. Authority of the patriarchal family is concentrated in the hands of the father or husband. The position of women is determined largely by traditional roles and statuses, especially in the countryside. The woman is in a traditional position that performs roles such as "housewife" and "maternity" as per the gender-based division of labor (14-16). In a study conducted by Ökten in the same region in 2006, it was indicated that the majority of household heads (64.3%) defined the function of a woman as motherhood (childbearing and raising), that 22% of them defined it as doing the household chores and taking care of their husbands, and that 13.8% of them defined their wives as their life partners with a more egalitarian status (14). Since this research is not a prevalence type study, it cannot show the level of the traditionalist attitude. However, women with low education, with Arab and Kurdish ethnic origins, and who lived in extended families have a more traditional attitude in terms of gender roles. The population of Şanlıurfa consists of families of Turkish, Kurdish and Arab origin, and these different ethnic groups tend to preserve their own culture. Especially extended families are families in which the patriarchal structure of the countryside and the pressure of cultural beliefs are more prominent (14).

The average number of children the participants of this study desired to have was higher than 2.8, which is the country's average (17). Considering that the fertility of the women who participated in the study continues, this number should be expected to increase further. On the other hand, women who have traditionalist gender roles both have a higher number of children and tend to prefer male children more often. Although fertility seems like a behavior that does not require any outside intervention, in practice, it is known that it is influenced by people's cultural and social values and

traditional beliefs. In this context, some studies have shown that gender roles may be related to reproductive behavior (18-20). Although studies suggest that fertility will increase as gender equality progresses in families (21,22), in Kaufman's (2000) study, it is stated that women with a traditionalist attitude tend to have more children than women with an egalitarian attitude (23). This is because women who have accepted the traditional gender roles consider the concept of motherhood a central element in their social lives and allow it to direct their reproductive behavior (19). According to this study, as in Kaufman's work, women with traditional attitudes desired to have more children.

In the study, approximately one in four women stated that they preferred male children. In Eastern culture, it is highly important to have, especially male, children. Şanlıurfa is a city with a population devoted to their traditional culture, and where Eastern culture is predominant. It is significant for the women who preferred male children to have a lower score on the Gender Roles Attitude Scale and to have a traditionalist attitude towards gender roles in terms of demonstrating the importance of the cultural norms and values of the society in gender preference. The effect of the value attributed to a child is inevitable in the decision to have a child (19). In traditional societies, a male child is considered as both security for old age and an important force for the continuation of the family. At the same time, a male increases the status of a woman in her society, as he carries on the family name and the continuation of the lineage (7). Therefore, it is very important to have a male child for women who achieve their status in their societies through their fertility. In terms of features such as education, joining the workforce, and having economic power, which are very important in determining the status of women, it can be claimed that the women in this research are in a very dramatic state and they do not have any other tools than their fertility to achieve status.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

As a result of the study, it was found that education level and socio-cultural factors affect the attitudes of women towards gender roles in Şanlıurfa, and gender roles attitudes are effective in the number of children they have and their gender preference. In this context, based on the fact that the cultural structure of a society is effective in the development of its attitudes towards gender roles, and that these attitudes affect fertility behavior, it is suggested that social policies should be developed with a multidisciplinary perspective and that these factors should be considered in the planning and presentation of services that aim to reduce risky pregnancy and births that stem from high fertility to replace the traditionalist attitude with an egalitarian attitude.

The development of egalitarian gender roles by promoting women's education and participation in the workforce will contribute to the creation of societies that control fertility, reduce risky pregnancy and births, and do not engage in gender preference and discrimination.

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