

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

The Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic Process on Marital Adjustment and Psychological Well-Being of Married Couples

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Abstract

Objective: This study was conducted to determine the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic process on the marital adjustment and psychological well-being of married couples. The pandemic process causes various threats by affecting the life, relationships, and mental health of the individual, family, and society. Fear of catching the coronavirus and uncertainties about the future cause psychological problems, and these problems can sometimes disrupt marital adjustment when they change places and turn towards the spouse.

Materials and Methods: The research was conducted in a relational screening model to determine the variables that predict the marital adjustment of married individuals. The population of the research consists of 501 married individuals over the age of 18 who use social media and smartphones in Turkey. The data were obtained by the researchers by sharing the e-survey forms created from the personal information form, the marital adjustment test, and the psychological well-being scale on social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram.

Results: The participants' mean score on the marital adjustment scale was 44.22 ± 7.98 while the mean score on the psychological well-being scale was 38.72 ± 14.08 . It was determined that the marital adjustment and psychological well-being of the participants were above the mean. As a result of the statistical analysis, a positive and significant ($r=0.201$, $p<0.001$) relationship was found between psychological well-being variables and marital adjustment.

Conclusion: As a result of the study, it was determined that the pandemic process negatively affected individuals' marital adjustment and psychological well-being.

Keywords: Covid-19, Married Couples, Marital Adjustment, Psychological Well-Being

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, which has become a global health crisis, started in December 2019 with an epidemic of pneumonitis caused by a new type of coronavirus in the city of Wuhan, Hubei Province of China, and then spread to many countries of the world (1). Pandemics affect societies differently than classical diseases, as they threaten many people with the same disease. It causes large masses to live in fear and anxiety and disrupt the natural flow of life (2). Epidemics on a global scale cause behaviors such as not being able to tolerate situations such as compulsory isolation,

maintaining social distance, and staying at home (3). This situation also affects the marital relationship of the couples (1). Marriage is one of the most important and lasting interpersonal relationships (4). However, because of COVID-19, families face threats to their relationships, rules, and routines. Especially families with low-income levels and mental problems are more affected by the pandemic process than others. Families need to preserve their relationships in this period of stress and uncertainty for the satisfaction of their marriage (5). On the other hand, a strong marriage can be a great

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psychological support, especially during these times of uncertainty, and can contribute to the emotional well-being of both the individual and the family (6). Marriage provides couples with meaning for life, emotional support, and a sense of well-being, as well as reducing vulnerability to psychological disorders (7). Marital adjustment, which expresses the marital satisfaction of the couples, can be affected by many factors. One of them is psychological well-being. Psychological well-being has been defined as managing existential challenges in life (such as pursuing meaningful goals, personal growth, and establishing quality relationships with others) (8). Moreover, the concept of psychological well-being is a positive psychological functioning perspective consisting of six components including the individual's positive evaluation of his/her past life and her/himself, continuing to grow and develop as an individual, believing that life is meaningful and purposeful, establishing quality relationships with other people, having the capacity and freewill to effectively manage his/her life and environment (9). When a person with a low level of psychological well-being does not fulfill his/her responsibilities regarding family life, this may cause problems between spouses and lead to arguments. This may result in further deterioration of the psychological well-being of the spouse. It is also stated that the stressful family environment, which leads to unhappy marriages, hurts psychological well-being (10). It is reported that couples with more harmonious marital relationships and higher marital satisfaction have higher life satisfaction and psychological well-being than other couples (11). Important and compulsory changes in many areas of life, especially the mandatory quarantine brought by the COVID-19 pandemic process, disrupted the routines of families and created a threat to dyadic adjustment. Therefore, it is important to examine the effects of the pandemic process on the marital adjustment of couples.

The research sought answers to the following questions:

1. How is the marriage adjustment of couples during the pandemic process?
2. How is the psychological well-being of couples during the pandemic process?
3. Do demographic variables affect individuals' marital adjustment and psychological well-being?
4. Is there a relationship between marital adjustment and the psychological well-being of couples?
5. Does psychological well-being affect marital adjustment?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research was carried out in a relational screening model to determine the variables that predict the marital adjustment of married individuals. The data of the study were collected between March 15 and May 1, 2021, using snowball sampling. The population of the research consists of married individuals over the age of 18 who use social media and smartphones in Turkey. The G Power software was used to calculate the sample size. In line with the literature (12) the number of samples to be taken was determined as 248 people, with 95% confidence ($1-\alpha$), 95% test power ($1-\beta$), $d=0.2$ effect size for the "Marriage Adjustment Test". The sample of the study consisted of 501 married individuals who met the criteria for inclusion in the study. As a result of the study, the power of the test was obtained as 99%.

Inclusion criteria for the study; volunteering to participate in the study, being married for at least 6 months, being literate, using social media and smartphones, and being between the ages of 18-65.

Exclusion criteria from the study; are being illiterate, being married but living separately, and not using social media and smartphones.

Data Collection

The data were obtained by sharing the e-questionnaire forms created by the researchers on social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram.

Personal Information Form: This form, prepared by the researchers, contains information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the employees.

The Marital Adjustment Test (MAT): It was developed by Locke and Wallace (1959) to determine the marital adjustment of married couples (13). The MAT consists of a total of 15 items, both binary and Likert-type items. Each item is scored between 0-6, and these scores vary according to the number of options. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Kışlak (1996) (14). The Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient of MAT was determined as 0.80 by Kışlak (14). In this study, the cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale was determined as 0.85.

The Psychological Well-Being Scale: The scale was developed by Diener, Scollon and Lucas (2009) (15). It consists of eight items and one dimension. The Turkish validity and reliability studies of the scale were carried out by Telef (2013) (16). The answer options for the items

on the scale are numbered with strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7). The scoring of the Psychological Well-Being Scale ranges from 56 points if the answer strongly agrees with all the items, and 8 points if the answer strongly disagrees with all the items. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was determined as 87 (16). In this study, the cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale was determined as 0.96.

Data Analysis

SPSS v22.0 package program was used to evaluate the data. Percentage, mean and standard deviation are reported as descriptive statistics. Pearson's correlation coefficients was used to determine the relationship between variables. Independent Sample t-Test, One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Test and Post Hoc (Tukey and Games-Howell) tests were used. The significance level was established as $\alpha=0.05$.

Ethical Consideration

During the collection of research data, individuals were informed about the research online. While the principle of "Respect for Autonomy" was fulfilled by stating that they were free to participate in the research and to leave at any time after participating in the research, the principle of "Confidentiality and Protection of Confidentiality" was fulfilled by stating that the information of the patients participating in the research would be kept confidential. Furthermore, approval was received from the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Health Scientific Research Studies Commission (2021-01-04T09_59_46) and Gaziantep University Clinical Research Ethics Committee (2021/48).

RESULTS

The findings of the research conducted to examine the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic process on the marital adjustment and psychological well-being of married couples are given below.

The distribution of the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants is given in Table 1. Among the individuals, 77.4% of them were women, 75.6% were between the ages of 30-49, 51.5% were undergraduate graduates, 70.7% were working and 53.9% were public employees. The marriage age of 56.5% of the participants was between 18 and 25, the marriage type of 67.7% of them was dating/acquaintance, 35.3% of them had 6-10 years of marriage and 97.6% of them had one marriage. Among the participants 67.9% of them did not catch covid-19, 66.1% of them did not argue with their spouse

during the pandemic, 51.7% stated that there was a change in marital adjustment during the pandemic period, and 18.6% stated that the reason for this is psychological problems experienced during the pandemic period.

The findings of the t and ANOVA tests obtained by using the demographic characteristics of the participants and the mean of the scores they got from both scales are presented in Table 2. When the relevant table was examined, it was found that there were statistically significant differences between the age of the participants ($p=0.004$), the state of arguing with their spouse during the pandemic period ($p<0,001$), the change in marital adjustment during the pandemic period ($p<0,001$), the mean score of the marital adjustment scale and the year of marriage ($p= 0.001$). It was determined that these significant differences were respectively caused by individuals aged between 18-30, those who did not argue with their spouse during the pandemic period, those who did not have a change in marital adjustment during the pandemic period, and those whose marriage year was between 0-5. On the other hand, it was determined that there was no statistically significant difference between the participants' gender ($p= 0.064$), working status ($p=0.077$), number of marriage ($p= 0.346$), catching Covid-19 ($p= 0.495$), education level ($p= 0.239$), occupation ($p= 0.284$), marriage age ($p= 0.136$) and type of marriage ($p= 0.122$), and marital adjustment scale mean scores.

Furthermore, it was observed that there were statistically significant differences between the participants' gender ($p= 0.018$), discussion with their spouse during the pandemic period ($p= 0.011$), education level ($p= 0.002$), marriage type ($p<0.001$) and year of marriage ($p= 0.003$), and psychological well-being scale mean scores. It was determined that these significant differences were respectively caused by women, those who did not argue with their spouse during the pandemic, have postgraduates degrees, those who were married by dating, and those whose marriage year was between 0-5. On the other hand, it was determined that there was no statistically significant difference between the participants' working status ($p=0.133$), the number of marriages ($p=0.366$), catching Covid-19 ($p=0.303$), the change in marital adjustment during the pandemic period ($p= 0.906$), age ($p=0.124$) occupation ($p=0.054$), and age at marriage ($p=0.180$), and the mean scores of the psychological well-being scale.

The distribution of the total mean scores on the marital adjustment and psychological well-being scale of the participants is given in Table 3. The participants' mean

score on the marital adjustment scale was 44.22 ± 7.98 , and the mean score on the psychological well-being scale was 38.72 ± 14.08 . In addition, both scales have a very high internal reliability (C α) coefficient (Table 3).

The results of the Pearson's correlation coefficients between the participants' marital adjustment and psychological well-being scale are given in Table 4.

According to the results of Pearson's correlation coefficients, a positive and significant ($r=0.201$, $p=0.001$) relationship was found between psychological well-being and marital adjustment variables. These results show that as the psychological well-being of the participants marital adjustment levels also increase (Table 4).

Table 1. Distribution of the Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Study (n=501)

Variable	n	%
Gender		
Female	388	77.4
Male	113	22.6
Age		
18-30	103	20.6
30-49	379	75.6
50-64	19	3.8
Education level		
Literate/Primary School	14	2.8
Secondary Education/High School	92	18.4
Associate degree	56	11.2
Bachelor's degree	258	51.5
Postgraduate	81	16.2
Working status		
Yes	354	70.7
No	147	29.3
Occupation		
Public Employee	270	53.9
Private Sector Employee	71	14.2
Self-employment	23	4.6
Housewife	137	27.3
Marriage age		
18-25	283	56.5
26-30	174	34.7
31 and more	44	8.8
Type of marriage		
Arranged marriage	82	16.4
Flirting/Meet	339	67.7
Arranged marriage and meet	80	16.0
Duration of marriage		
0-5	139	27.7
6-10	177	35.3
11-20	125	25.0
21 and more	60	12.0
Number of marriages		
One	489	97.6
Two	12	2.4
Covid-19 catching status		
Yes	161	32.1
No	340	67.9
The situation of arguing with his spouse during the pandemic period		
Yes	170	33.9
No	331	66.1
Change in marital adjustment to the pandemic period		
Yes	259	51.7
No	242	48.3
If yes. the reason is;		
Lockdown	65	13.0
Psychological problems caused by the pandemic (anxiety. fear. insomnia. etc.)	93	18.6
Increased daily workload	67	13.6
Losing the job	34	6.8

Table 2. t and ANOVA Tests for Demographic Characteristics and Differences Between Scales (n=501)

t-test			Marital Adjustment		Psychological Well-Being	
		n	Mean± SD	p	Mean± SD	p
Gender	Female	388	43.87±7.76	0.064	39.62±13.31	0.018*
	Male	113	45.45±8.63		35.65±16.14	
Working status	Yes	354	44.64±8.05	0.077	39.33±14.22	0.133
	No	147	43.25±7.74		37.25±13.68	
Number of marriage	One	489	44.28±7.98	0.346	38.81±14.03	0.366
	Two	12	42.08±8.03		35.08±16.23	
Covid-19 catching status	Yes	161	44.58±7.86	0.495	39.61±12.66	0.303
	No	340	44.06±8.05		38.29±14.70	
The situation of having an argument with his wife during the pandemic period	Yes	170	40.89±8.52	<0.001*	36.50±14.29	0.011*
	No	331	45.94±7.12		39.86±13.85	
Change status in marital adjustment during the pandemic period	Yes	259	41.92±8.29	<0.001*	38.64±13.16	0.906
	No	242	46.69±6.84		38.79±15.03	
ANOVA test			Mean± SD	p	Mean± SD	p
Age				0.004* (a-b,c)		0.079
	(a) 18 – 30	103	46.05±7.38	-	41.11±11.38	
	(b) 30-49	379	43.93±8.00	0.043	38.20±14.65	
	(c) 50-64	19	40.10±8.74	0.008	36.05±14.72	
Tukey HSD post hoc test c<b<a						
Education Level				0.231		0.002* (d-a;e-a)
	(a) Literate/Primary School	14	44.28±9.16		28.50±15.81	-
	(b) Secondary Education/High School	92	43.03±7.80		36.51±14.89	0.263
	(c) Associate Degree	56	43.41±8.16		35.62±14.55	0.425
	(d) Bachelor's degree	258	45.00±7.22		40.01±13.28	0.022
	(e) Postgraduate	81	43.66±9.87		41.02±13.87	0.017
Tukey HSD post hoc test a<c<b<d<e						
Occupation				0.284		0.054
	Public Employee	270	44.38±8.37		40.19±13.78	
	Private Sector Employee	71	45.07±7.07		36.83±14.09	
	Self-employment	23	45.69±6.75		40.04±16.95	
	Housewife	137	43.23±7.79		36.57±13.89	
Marriage age		283		0.136		0.180
	18-25		43.62±7.94		37.71±14.70	
	26-30	174	44.85±7.93		39.85±13.14	
	31 and more	44	45.61±8.25		40.70±13.26	
Type of marriage				0.122		<0.001* (b-a;c-a)
	(a) Arranged marriage	82	42.74±7.96		32.59±16.03	
	(b) Flirting/Meet	339	44.69±8.18		40.41±13.06	
	(c) Arranged marriage and meet	80	43.80±6.95		37.82±14.45	
Games-Howell post hoc test a<c<b						
Duration of marriage				0.001* (a-c,d)	41.43±11.62	0.003* (a-c,d)
	(a) 0-5		46.28±7.56			
		139		-		-
	(b) 6-10	177	44.28±7.97	0.115	39.53±13.93	0.709
	(c) 11-20	125	42.97±7.80	0.004	36.50±15.28	0.022
(d) 21 and more	60	41.91±8.36	0.002	34.65±15.72	0.020	
Games-Howell post hoc test d<c<b<a						
Tukey HSD post hoc test d<c<b<a						

Abbreviations: ANOVA: Analysis of variance; HSD: Honest significant difference; Mean; SD: Standard deviation. *Significant level was considered at $p < 0.05$.

Table 3. Participants' Marital Adjustment and Psychological Well-Being Scale Total Scores, Standard Deviations, Minimum – Maximum and Cronbach Alpha Values.

Scale	Number of items	Mean ± SD	Values that can be taken from the scales		Values of Participants		Cronbach Alpha
				Maximum	Minimum	Maximum	
Marital adjustment	15	44.22± 7.98	1	60	19	60	0.85
Psychological well-being	8	38.72± 14.08	1	56	8	56	0.96

Abbreviations: SD: Standard deviation

Table 4. Relationship Between Marital Adjustment and Psychological Well-Being Scale.

Scales		Marital Adjustment
Psychological well-being	r*	0.201
	p	<0.001**
	n	501

* Pearson correlation coefficient was used. ** Significant level was considered at $p < 0.05$.

DISCUSSION

The pandemic process causes various threats by affecting the life, relationships, and mental health of the individual, family, and society. Fear of catching the coronavirus and uncertainties about the future cause psychological problems, and these problems can sometimes disrupt marital adjustment when they change place and turn towards the spouse (6). In this study, 33.9% of the individuals argued with their spouse during the pandemic period, 51.7% stated that there was a change in marital adjustment and 18.6% stated that the reason for this was due to the mental problems experienced during the pandemic period. Reizer et al. (2020) stated in their study that marital satisfaction decreased and psychological distress increased in women with fear of COVID-19 (17). During the pandemic, couples with high marital adjustment tolerate restrictions, social distance, isolation and domestic problems better and are less affected psychologically (5). On the other hand, couples with low marital adjustment may not tolerate the mandatory changes brought by the pandemic and may experience an increase in mental problems (18).

The social changes caused by the Covid-19 pandemic can accelerate crisis and turmoil by triggering uncertainty even in the closest relationships, which can threaten physical and psychological well-being (19). Covid-19 causes anxiety as it negatively affects the normal life of many people at the same time and contains many uncertainties. The rate of spread of the virus and the rate of human-to-human transmission also put pressure on individual relationships. Since there is not

enough information about how long the pandemic will last and how it will get worse, the uncertainty that arises increases anxiety. Feeling stressed and anxious every day during the pandemic period may also have negative effects on psychological well-being (20). Statistically significant differences were found between the psychological well-being scale mean scores of the individuals participating in the study and their gender, the state of having arguments with their spouse during the pandemic period, education level, type of marriage, and year of marriage. In this study, it was found that men's psychological well-being levels were lower. It is thought that the factors causing this situation may be the fact that men have to stay at home as a result of the mandatory quarantines and lockdown, it is not clear how long the uncertainties will last, and they are in financial anxiety and loneliness. Rogers and DeBoer (2001) stated in their study that income and employment have beneficial effects on the psychological well-being of both women and men (21).

In this study, it was determined that individuals who argued with their spouses had lower psychological well-being scores. It was thought that the difficult conditions brought by the pandemic could increase the anxiety and anxiety levels of individuals and set the stage for discussions. It was observed that the level of psychological well-being increased as the education level of the individuals participating in the study increased. This result is similar to the literature (8,22). It is thought that the increase in education level in the pandemic may reflect high health literacy and protect individuals psychologically. In the study, the psychological well-being levels of those who were married by dating/meeting and those with 0-5 years of marriage were found to be high. It can be said that being in the early years of marriage during the pandemic and getting married by meeting/love play a protective role in couples and contribute to the psychological well-being of people.

In the study, it was determined that the marital adjustment and psychological well-being levels of the participants were moderate. When the literature is

examined, psychological problems have been identified in individuals during the pandemic process (22–24). Wang et al. (2020) stated that as a result of their meta-analysis study, one out of three adults in the general population has psychological distress related to COVID-19. (22) Certain public health measures that may be necessary to contain the spread of the pandemic, such as quarantine and social distancing, may have further increased the risk of negative psychological outcomes in marriage. At the same time, social distancing makes couples feel safer, while isolation can also increase feelings of stress and frustration and cause difficulties in many life situations.

When the literature is examined, it is seen that psychological well-being is related to many variables. One of these variables is marriage. Marriage plays a positive role in the mental health and happiness of individuals. In addition, marriage reduces vulnerability to psychological disorders by providing individuals with meaning in life, emotional support, and a sense of well-being (7, 25). In this study, a positive and significant relationship was found between psychological well-being variables and marital adjustment. These results show that as the psychological well-being of the participant's increases, their marital adjustment levels also increase. Chua et al. (2021) determined in their study that the psychological problems of couples negatively affect the well-being of individuals, while the increase in the quality of their relationship positively affects their psychological well-being (26). In another study, Pieh et al. (2020) determined that individuals with good relationship quality during the Covid-19 process have better mental health (27). When the literature is examined, it is noteworthy that there is a strong relationship between psychological well-being and marriage (7, 28).

Limitations

The limitations of this study include the small sample size and the use of self-report questionnaires. The relatively small sample size of the study may limit the statistical power, so it is necessary to increase the sample size for the results to be more generalizable.

CONCLUSION

During the pandemic period, individuals' marital adjustment and psychological well-being are above the mean. It can be thought that this situation arises from the characteristics of the society in which the participants live and the importance given to the family system. Additionally when the data of the study were analyzed, it was determined that psychological

well-being significantly predicted marital adjustment. Based on these results, it is recommended to plan psychoeducational programs that support psychological well-being for couples, as situations that increase the psychological well-being of individuals will also increase their marital adjustment.

In future studies, the effect of psychological well-being on marital adjustment can be examined in depth with different variables, quantitative and qualitative data.

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Author Contributions:

Research idea: EB,NU,SÖ

Design of the study: EB,NU,SÖ

Acquisition of data for the study: EB,NU,SÖ

Analysis of data for the study: EB

Interpretation of data for the study: EB,NU,SÖ

Drafting the manuscript: EB,NU,SÖ

Revising it critically for important intellectual content: EB,NU,SÖ

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