Examining the Relationship between the Meaning Attributed to Marriage and Loneliness: The Mediating Role of Hopelessness

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Abstract

In this study, the mediating role of hopelessness in the relationship between the meaning attributed to marriage and loneliness was examined. The study group consists of 567 participants (348 male, and 219 female). Data were obtained using "Meaning Attributed to Marriage Scale", "UCLA Loneliness Scale Short Form" and "Beck Hopelessness Scale". In line of research hypothesis, the research data were analyzed using regression analysis. In addition, whether hopelessness has a statistically significant mediating effect on the relationship between the meaning attributed to marriage and loneliness was tested using the mediator model in line with the research hypotheses. In the mediator model tested, it was seen that hopelessness had a partial mediating effect on the relationship between the positive and negative meanings attributed to marriage and loneliness.

Keywords: Marriage, Positive meaning attributed to marriage, Negative meaning attributed to marriage, Loneliness, Hopelessness.

Introduction

Although marriage differs from culture to culture, it can be said that it is a type of relationship that is accepted in almost all societies. Marriage, which is legally seen as an agreement between two people and a commitment contract between spouses (Cott, 2002; Rauch, 2004), is also defined as a social institution. Marriage also regulates the general health status of spouses and supports life satisfaction (Hayward & Zhang, 2006). While marriage means the condition of living in society, a means of eliminating loneliness and providing a comfortable financial future; it is also seen as a way to have children. In this context, it can be said that the expectation and meaning of marriage change according to the needs of each individual (Yazıcı, 2020).

People naturally have a need for meaning, and they attribute various meanings to marriage. (Güler, 2021). While some individuals define marriage as a new beginning, a continuation of the generation, sexual union, responsibility, not being alone, being a family, and sharing life, some individuals think that marriage is a result of social pressure and marriage is just a signature (Baş & Cengiz, 2018). The meanings that individuals attribute to marriage are generally shaped by the images they create (Tekin, 2020). These images differ with the quality of the time individuals spend with their spouses, whether the expectations are met in marriage (Özabacı et al., 2019), the individual's attachment style, the marriage of their parents, and their past lives (Yıldırım, 2019). In addition, the concepts of hopelessness and loneliness can be counted among the important factors affecting the image of marriage in terms of negatively affecting individuals' mood, cognitive perceptions, attribution styles, future expectations, and beliefs about the future (Turan, 2010).

Psychological problems experienced by the individual can affect their views on marriage and, as a result, marital satisfaction and quality. Loneliness and hopelessness are seen as factors that affect an individual's views on marriage (Kahraman, 2018; Vatan & Dağ, 2009). Loneliness is an undesirable experience and a subjective process based on individuals' expectations and perceptions of the lack of social relationships (Jones & Hebb, 2003). Ünlü (2015) defines loneliness as an emotion felt by synthesizing the desire to be in close relationships with others in a cognitive, emotional, and behavioral context. In this process, the individual evaluates his past

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and present relationships with cognitive processes, creates negative emotions due to personal evaluations, and may develop a behavioral pattern of loneliness.

Factors causing loneliness include pessimism, shyness, fear of self-expression (Michela et al., 1982), inability to establish relationships, traumatic experiences, and avoidance of relationships with partners of the opposite sex (Buluş, 1996). Lonely individuals are more likely to make wrong choices because they are insufficient to initiate and maintain a relationship with the opposite sex. Individuals who prefer loneliness believe that they will be constantly hurt and disappointed, and at the same time, these individuals who are worried about emotional attachment think that they cannot satisfy their partners' emotional needs (Young, 1982). In this context, the negative thinking styles of individuals who have a sense of loneliness affect the person's view of romantic relationships and marriage in many ways.

It can be thought that the concept of hopelessness also has an important effect on the meaning attributed to marriage since the individual has negative expectations for the future, and the feelings of pessimism and helplessness affect the individual negatively at the cognitive level. Hope is a universal concept with a strong impact on life (Moore, 2005). In this respect, the concept of hope has vital importance for the individual. In the absence of it, it is stated that it evokes dying while living (Aydın et al., 2015). Hopelessness is when a person has a negative attitude toward the future and loses motivation for it (Üngören & Ehtiyar, 2009). A hopeless individual experiences negative emotions such as loss of will to live, deterioration in perception, difficulty remembering the past, unhappiness, helplessness, pessimism, loss of courage, irritability, and not being able to enjoy life (Öz, 2010). As a result of these negative emotions, the deterioration of the individual's perception of the environment may also affect their relationships, attitudes, and perspectives. In this respect, it can be thought that the meaning attributed to marriage by individuals who experience hopelessness and pessimism will also differ.

When the literature is examined, many studies examine loneliness and hopelessness together (Chang et al., 2015; Demirel et al., 2015; Girgin, 2009; Pervin & Ferdowshi, 2016). However, no study was found in which loneliness, hopelessness, and the meaning attributed to marriage were examined together. According to the results of the research, there is a positive relationship between hopelessness and loneliness, and they predict each other. It is thought that the concepts of hopelessness and loneliness have an important effect in terms of changing the cognitive perceptions and attribution styles of the individual and thus affecting the meaning attributed to marriage. It is thought that examining how hopelessness has a mediating role between the meaning attributed to marriage and loneliness in terms of reducing positive expectations for the future and creating feelings of pessimism and helplessness will contribute to the literature. In this context, in this study, an answer to the question "Does hopelessness mediate the relationship between the meaning attributed to marriage and loneliness?", was sought.

Method

Research Design

The research model is the relational research model, one of the quantitative research methods. The relational research model is a research model that aims to determine whether there is a relationship between two or more variables and the degree of this relationship (Büyüköztürk et al., 2008). In this research model, it has been tried to examine whether hopelessness has a mediating role in the relationship between the meaning attributed to marriage and loneliness.

Participants

The study group for research consists of a total of 567 participants, 348 (61.4%) female and 219 (38.6%) male. Among the participants, there were 220 (38.8%) people who had a romantic relationship and 347 (61.2%) people who did not have a romantic relationship.

Measures

The Scale of Meaning of Marriage (SMM)

Developed by Özabacı, Körük, and Kara (2018), The Scale of Meaning of Marriage (SMM) consists of 31 items. The seventh and eighteenth items on the scale are reverse-scored. The scale is a 5-point Likert scale (1 - I

disagree, 5-I agree) type measurement tool. According to the exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, the findings show that SMM has a nine-factor structure. The sub-factors of SMM are functionality, devotion, intimacy, complementarity, frustration, struggle, cooperation, risk, and compliance expectancy.

The Cronbach-Alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be .80 for the WHOLE SCALE, and it took values between .41 and .77 for the sub-factor. Two general total points are taken from the scale, namely the positive meaning score and the negative meaning score attributed to marriage, and each factor is scored within itself. The highest positive marriage meaning score that can be obtained from SMM is 105, and the lowest is 23. The highest negative marital meaning score that can be obtained from the scale is 40, while the lowest is 8. When we look at the positive marital meaning scores, an individual's score higher than 69 indicates that he or she generally attributes a positive meaning to marriage, while a negative meaning score of 24 points indicates that the individual attributes a negative meaning to marriage.

The UCLA Loneliness Scale Short Form (ULS-8)

The UCLA Loneliness Scale Short Form (ULS-8) was developed by Hays and DiMatteo (1987) and adapted into Turkish by Doğan et al. (2011). Within the scope of the study, exploratory factor analysis was performed on the UCLA Loneliness Scale (ULS-20), developed by researchers Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona (1980), and as a result of the analysis, a 5-factor structure was obtained, and the UCLA Loneliness Scale Short Form (ULS-8) was formed with 8 items collected in the first factor. The scale consists of a 4-point Likert type (1–Not at all suitable, 4–Completely appropriate), and there are 2 reverse coded items (3rd and 6th items). The highest score that can be obtained from the scale is 32, and the lowest score is 8. As the scores obtained from the scale increase, the loneliness level of the individual also increases.

The Beck Hopelessness Scale

The scale developed by Beck et al. (1974) was adapted into Turkish by Seber (1991). The scale consists of 20 true-false propositions with 11 true and 9 false key answers. 1 point is given for each compatible answer to the key, and 0 points are given for each incompatible answer. The total score obtained was accepted as the "Hopelessness score". The possible variability of scores ranges from 0 to 20. Turkish form of BHS. As a result of the reliability studies conducted by Beck et al., the internal consistency coefficient of the scale was reported as 0.93. According to the factor analysis performed in the construct validity study, it was revealed that the scale consisted of three factors: "feelings about the future","loss of motivation," and "hope (Durak and Palabıyıkoğlu, 1994). In addition, the ability of the scale to discriminate between the patient and control groups was examined, and it was found that the difference between the mean scores obtained from the patient and control groups was significant (Seber, 1991; cited in Savaşır & Şahin, 1997).

Procedure

The data were collected by a convenient sampling method. Convenient sampling is defined as the selection of the sample from easily accessible and applicable units due to limitations in terms of time, money, and labor (Büyüköztürk, 2014). The data collection tools were applied to individuals aged 18 and over residing in different cities in Turkey in the years 2021–2022. The data were collected through a form transferred to the virtual environment. The participants were informed about the purpose, importance, and scope of the research, and the principles of voluntariness and confidentiality were taken as a basis.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was made using the SPSS 20.0 package program. The findings were evaluated at the 95% confidence interval and based on the .05 significance level. First of all, the data set was examined to evaluate the suitability of the data for statistical analysis, and it was seen that there was no missing value since the data were collected online. Kurtosis, skewness, and Mahalanobis distance scores were examined for linearity and normality, and 15 values were extracted from the data set. The results of testing the assumptions are presented in Table 1.

The mediation effect of hopelessness in the relationship between the meaning attributed to marriage and loneliness was tested with the mediation analysis based on regression developed by Hayes (2013). Hayes (2013) stated that regression-based mediation analysis is a statistical method used to determine how some causal factor X transfers its effect to Y.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and test results for the normality assumption

	N	Minimum	Maximum	$\bar{x}$	Sd	Skewness	Kurtosis
Positive Meaning Attributed to Marriage	567	52	115	91.80	15.324	-.541	-.791
Negative Meaning Attributed to Marriage	567	14	31	22.52	4.064	.113	-.744
Loneliness	567	8	27	14.89	4.199	.467	-.295
Hopelessness	567	0	20	8.71	4.346	.121	-.788

According to Table 1, skewness values vary between -.541 and .467, and kurtosis values range between -.791 and -.295. According to the table, it was seen that the skewness and kurtosis values of all variables were between +1 and -1. Skewness and kurtosis values between +1 and -1 are acceptable limits for the assumption of normality (Hair et al., 2013). Accordingly, it was accepted that the data showed a normal distribution.
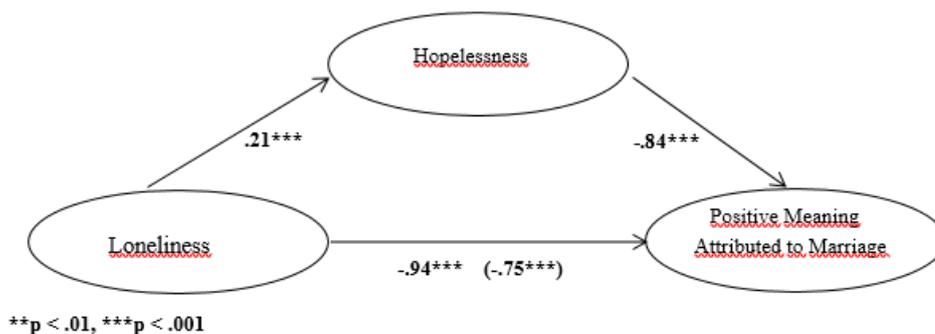
Results

Findings on the Mediating Role of Hopelessness in the Relationship Between Positive Meaning Attributed to Marriage and Loneliness

The Process Macro application developed by Hayes (2013) was used to determine whether hopelessness mediates the relationship between the positive meaning attributed to marriage and loneliness. The bootstrap technique was applied in the regression analysis using Model 4 in Process Macro. The results obtained are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Findings on the mediating role of hopelessness in the relationship between positive meaning attributed to marriage and loneliness

Predictors	Hopelessness (M)			Positive Meaning Attributed to Marriage (Y)		
	β	SE	t	β	SE	t
Loneliness (X)	.213	.045	4.704	-.759	.154	-4.918
Hopelessness (M)	-	-	.	-.845	.141	-5.973
Constant	5.555	.691	8.031	110.632	2.435	45.422
	$R^2 = .0384$, $F(1,554) = 22.134$, $p < .01$			$R^2 = .1184$, $F(2,553) = 37.119$, $p < .01$		
Bootstrap Results for Indirect Effects			β	Boot SE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Indirect Effect	Hopelessness		-.047	.013	-.075	-.024

The results of the regression analysis showing the effect of hopelessness (M), which is the mediator variable between loneliness (X) and the positive meaning attributed to marriage (Y), are given in the table. Accordingly, loneliness was found to predict hopelessness positively ($\beta = .213$; $t = 4.704$; $p < .05$). At the same time, it was determined that loneliness predicted the positive meaning attributed to marriage negatively ($\beta = -.759$; $t = -4.918$; $p < .05$). On the other hand, it was found that hopelessness negatively predicted the positive meaning attributed to marriage ($\beta = -.845$; $t = -5.973$; $p < .05$). In this context, when the indirect effect of the mediator variable in the 95% confidence interval is examined, BootLLCI = -.075 for hopelessness is calculated as BootULCI = -.024. Since both bootstrap lower (BootLLCI) and upper (BootULCI) values in the 95% confidence interval are below zero, hopelessness has a significant mediating role in this model. Looking at the fully standardized effect size of the mediation effect (K2hopelessness = -.047), it is seen that hopelessness has a mediating effect close to the middle value. In Figure 1, the graphical representation of Model 4 is given.

Figure 1: The mediating role of hopelessness in the relationship between the positive meaning attributed to marriage and loneliness (Model 4)

Findings on the Mediating Role of Hopelessness in the Relationship Between Negative Meaning Attributed to Marriage and Loneliness

To determine the mediator role of hopelessness in the relationship between the negative meaning attributed to marriage and loneliness, the bootstrap technique was used in the regression analysis, and the findings are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Findings on the mediating role of hopelessness in the relationship between negative meaning attributed to marriage and loneliness

Predictors	Hopelessness (M)			Negative Meaning Attributed to Marriage (Y)		
	β	SE	t	β	SE	t
Loneliness (X)	.213	.045	4.704	.131	.038	3.395
Hopelessness (M)	-	-	.	.421	.035	11.9045
Constant	5.555	.691	8.031	16.920	.6084	27.8109
	$R^2 =.0384$, $F(1,554) = 22.134$, $p < .01$			$R^2 =.2413$, $F(2,553) = 87.924$, $p < .01$		
Bootstrap Results for Indirect Effects			β	Boot SE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Indirect Effect	Hopelessness		.0200	.0502	.1278	

When Table 3 is examined, loneliness positively predicts hopelessness ($\beta = .213$; $t = 4.704$; $p < .05$). However, it was determined that loneliness positively predicted the negative meaning attributed to marriage ($\beta = .131$; $t = -3.395$; $p < .05$). However, it was determined that hopelessness positively predicted the negative meaning attributed to marriage ($\beta = .421$; $t = 11.9045$; $p < .05$). In this context, when the indirect effect of the mediator variable in the 95% confidence interval is examined, BootLLCI = .0502 for hopelessness is calculated as BootULCI = .1278. Since both bootstrap lower (BootLLCI) and upper (BootULCI) values in the 95% confidence interval are above zero, hopelessness has a significant mediating role in this model. When the fully standardized effect size of the mediation effect is examined (K2hopelessness = .08), it is seen that hopelessness has a mediating effect close to the middle value. In Figure 2, the graphical representation of Model 4 is given.
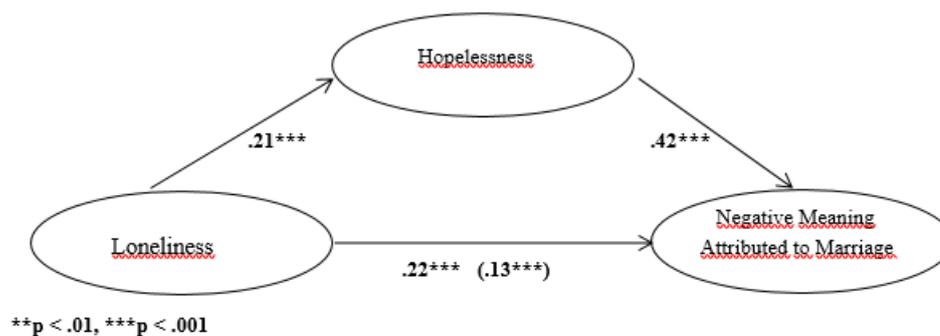
Figure 2: The mediating role of hopelessness in the relationship between the negative meaning attributed to marriage and loneliness (Model 4)

Discussion and Recommendations

In the current study, it was examined whether the variable of hopelessness had a mediating role in the relationship between the meaning attributed to marriage and loneliness, and it was determined that hopelessness partially mediated the relationship between loneliness and the positive and negative meaning attributed to marriage. When the relevant literature was examined, no other research findings were found in which this model was tested. The mediator variable is defined as the variable that increases the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986). According to the results obtained, when the hopelessness variable is kept constant, the relationship between the positive meaning attributed to marriage and the negative meaning of loneliness decreases. To be more clearly expressed, despair: Finding a mediator role in the relationship between loneliness and the meaning attributed to marriage can be interpreted as the increase in the level of hopelessness increasing or strengthening the predictor of the individual's loneliness level on the meaning attributed to marriage. Considering that the hopelessness levels of individuals have significant relationships with both loneliness and the positive and negative meaning attributed to marriage, it can be seen as an expected result that hopelessness is a mediator variable in the meaningful confidence interval. According to this result, the high level of loneliness among individuals affects the positive meaning attributed to marriage negatively, but it explains that with the increase in hopelessness levels, the positive meaning attributed to marriage will be at a lower level. Similarly, the increase in the loneliness levels of individuals increases the negative meaning attributed to marriage, but it is seen that the negative meaning attributed to marriage will be higher with a high level of hopelessness.

Inadequate life satisfaction and future expectations, low self-esteem, vulnerability schema, depression, and suicidality lead people to despair. Hopelessness causes the individual to develop a negative cognitive attribution style (Abramson et al., 2002). In this context, individuals' cognitively negative perspective also lays the groundwork for their pessimistic approach to the future. Based on this situation, hopelessness is a mediating variable for the meaning attributed to marriage in individuals with high levels of loneliness; It may be related to aspects that create future anxiety, prevent the formation of positive expectations about the future, and have negative feelings that nothing will go well no matter what the individual does (Ottekin, 2009). Since these negative feelings and thoughts are very strong predictors of both hopelessness and loneliness, it may be expected that the two variables together increase the negative meaning of marriage and decrease the positive meaning. Depression, which is the most important predictor of loneliness and hopelessness, has been defined as a disease that causes symptoms such as worthlessness, reluctance, weakness, and pessimism in the individual (Öztürk & Uluşahin, 2015). In the literature, there are many studies on depression, hopelessness, and loneliness. According to the results of the research, depression creates negative thoughts in the cognitive schemas of the person, and as depression progresses, negative thoughts become increasingly dominant (Arkar, 1992). The increase in feelings of worthlessness, reluctance, and powerlessness in depressed individuals may cause them to feel even more lonely. As a result, it can be said that the increase in pessimism and negative thoughts in the individual, the decrease in beliefs about the future, and the increase in hopelessness levels will increase the negative meaning attributed to marriage and decrease the positive meaning.

Shortcomings and Limitations

However, the results should be interpreted in terms of the shortcomings and limitations of the study. First, the current study was conducted with a convenience sample of non-infected individuals. The results of the present research are simply based on the self-reports of the participants. This study has limitations due to the correlational research method. Experimental studies can be conducted on these subjects in future studies. Since the meaning attributed to marriage, which is one of the research variables, is a new concept in the literature, studies on it are limited. Therefore, it can be repeated more often in different variants and in various examples. Example of unmarried couples or divorced persons living together; It can be developed by examining different socio-demographic variables such as traumatic experience, education level, place of residence, and income level. In order to reduce the loneliness levels of individuals and strengthen their social support resources, structured psycho-educational group studies can be conducted starting in preschool, including topics that develop social skills such as communication skills, social skills, and assertiveness. Based on the conclusion that successful marriages create happy families and happy families create healthy societies, marriage education can be taught as a course in formal education institutions, or programs related to marriage education can be organized through mass media. When the literature is examined, no research has been found that includes all three of the variables examined within the scope of the research. More studies are needed due to the limited number of studies examining the positive and negative meanings attributed to marriage, loneliness, and hopelessness. In this respect, it is thought that this research will be informative for future studies.

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Author (s) Contribution Rate
The authors of the study contributed equally at all stages, from the planning of the research to the writing of the discussion part.

Conflicts of Interest
There is no conflict of interest in the present research.

Ethical Approval (only for necessary papers)
Ethical permission (07.09.2021-76212) was obtained from Duzce University Scientific Research Institute for this research.

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