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## **EXAMINING UNDERGRADUATES' PERSPECTIVES ON THE CONCEPTS FAMILY AND MARRIAGE**

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### Abstract

The current study aimed to examine undergraduates' perspectives on the concepts family and marriage, what they expect of the person that they want to marry, their opinions on having a family and on the necessity of having a child to become a family, and if love is enough to start and become a family or not. The participants were 61 undergraduates matriculating at Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University in the 2020 – 2021 Academic Year. Data were collected in written by open-ended questions and were qualitatively content-analyzed. The participants' views showed that marriage meant humanitarian values and feelings, a precious entity and mostly infinite trust. They wanted their future-partners to have moral values and to be devoted to family. The participants related the importance of having a family to human nature and faith, and attached importance to loving and being loved, having a partner as an attribute of human nature, and raising children beneficial to society. They did not regard having a child as the chief condition of becoming a family, and thought that what is important is to live in peace together. They also pointed out that love alone is not enough to become a family, respect and loyalty are very important along with responsibility and financial status. The results may be helpful in knowing more about young people who are expected to raise future generations, and taking necessary measures accordingly. The results may be used as a guide by academicians and families.

*Keywords:* Undergraduates, Family, Marriage, Children, Society.

### 1. Introduction

Although marriage varies from culture to culture, it is an officially agreed togetherness which has long placed in communities nourished by traditions (Tarhan, 2017). Marriage is the agreement of sharing the same house and having and raising children (Özgüven, 2014). It is the long-life togetherness which aims for protecting each other, being harmonious and trustworthy. This is through the bond between partners, which is supposed to be firm, durable, and sound. Those who have weak relationship lack sharing, trust and solidarity, and they are inharmonious (Vatandaş, 2012). As a social being, humans desire happiness with the opposite sex, and actualize this with the concept marriage. It is the motive of marrying which actualizes, maintains and makes marriage meaningful. This motive is gained through firm, indispensable and social consciousness from the very beginning (Özgürler, 1990). Individuals growing up in different cultures and having distinct characteristics constitute the institution of marriage. The longevity of this institution does not only have an impact on partners but also on their children and relatives. The age of paternity/maternity is also important with the coming of marriage age (Yalom, 2002). When partners become fathers and mothers, institution of marriage is then literally established. Family, which regulates conformity and order in the society, is a crucial element that plays an active role in restructuring the society and helping with its creativity. Hence, societies can set their own ways and principles. For example, meeting individuals' physiological, financial, cultural and psychological needs is through conformity and integration with the society (Gülerce, 2007).

Being the closest environment to the child, family is an important element in supporting children's superior developmental areas. It is a role model for the child with its every action. It also helps the child practise his/her social skills. Both consciously and unconsciously, parents affect children's thinking, perceiving and behaving patterns from birth (Alisinanoğlu, 2003). Generally viewed, girls are fond of their fathers while boys love their mothers more. This leads girls to imitate their mothers and boys to imitate their fathers. Thus, parental effect is of great importance in child development. Children become the reflection of the family within this process (Yavuzer, 2006; Lund, 2021). If codes are negative or weak in a family, it will eliminate the possibility to raise individuals beneficial to society along with its negative effects on the sustainability of generations. A well-structured society is linked to firmness of the family because the family constitutes the cornerstone of peace, welfare, education and financial status in society. A family which is weakened and damaged in integrity may cause irreversible problems in social life (Gökçe, 1991). If the child is happy, he/she becomes a happy adult; a happy adult starts a happy family and a prosperous society is established as a consequence. This is like a chained process, like domino effect; a detriment in any of them negatively affects the others. The first social institution for the child is her/his family. It is home where children learn about and experience life (Dönmezler, 1999). There are some factors affecting parents-child relation. These may be counted as parents' places of birth, parents' educational background, birth order, gender, the number of siblings, and socio-cultural and financial status of the family (Senemoglu, 2012). In brief, family is the basis of societies, and it has no counterparts because it has a key role in shaping personality. Individuals get in touch with social environment with the help of the family. The communication stemmed in the family does not only help the child socialize conveniently but also helps with societal sustainability by educating its new members.

#### Purpose

The current study aimed to examine undergraduates' perspectives on the concepts family and marriage. It is expected to be significant in that it may evaluate undergraduates' ideas on the concepts family and marriage and provide positive feedback if needed, and be a guide to them.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Design

The current study was qualitatively designed and conducted. A qualitative research is generally preferred for deeper exploration of a specified subject (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Singh, 2007; Patton, 2014). Designed in phenomenological research, the data of the current study were collected with the interview technique and content-analyzed. Phenomenological design focuses on subjects for thorough exploration (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). In phenomenology, researchers enquire into participants' thoughts, conceptions, perceptions and expectations. Phenomenology is not generalizing but descriptive (Baş & Akturan, 2008).

### 2.2. Participants

The participants were 61 (7 males, 54 females) voluntary undergraduates, ranging in age from 19 to 22, matriculating at Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University in the 2020 – 2021 Academic Year.

### 2.3. Data Collection Instrument Development

A draft form of 7 open-ended questions was prepared and performed with 30 undergraduates as the pilot study. Basing on the pilot study results, the draft form was finalized by consulting the views of 4 academicians and 4 teachers. As a result, the form was agreed to be comprised of 5 open-ended questions.

#### 2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

Data of “Examining undergraduates’ perspectives on family and marriage” and demographics were collected online. Descriptive and content analysis were performed in data analyses. The participants were coded as P1, P2, P3 etc., and categories, codes and numbers extracted from the analyses were elaborately displayed in tables and some findings were directly cited without any modifications in order to provide inner consistency.

### 3. Results

The participants completed the sentence “Family means ..... to me because .....” and then the answers were first coded and then categorized. Table 1 displays the related information.

**Table 1.** Participants’ Statements on What Family Means to Them

Code	Category	N
My family is an unbreakable wall.		6
They are always beside me unconditionally.	Infinite trust	28
We turn to them when we are hurt.		8
I learnt to respect in the family.		5
They were the first to dream, cry and laugh beside.	Humanitarian values and emotions	5 14
Sacrifice and empathy.		10
Loyalty and sincerity.		
They are our breath, our treasure.		7
Family is sacred, it is unbreakable.	Most precious asset	4
Family keeps everything needed to be happy.		10
They are all I possess.		4
They shape personality and society.		12
You share your meal, trouble, and your life.	Fidelity and sharing	10
You need them even if you are grown up.		4

Table 1 shows four categories extracted by what family means to the participants, namely infinite trust, humanitarian values and emotions, most precious asset, and fidelity and sharing. 42 statements referred to infinite trust, 34 statements indicated humanitarian values and emotions, 37 statements pointed to most precious asset, and 14 statements referred to fidelity and sharing. Regarding Table 1, it may be concluded that the concept family mostly associates infinite trust. Some of the participants’ statements are as follows:

P1: “To me, family is the place of infinite trust, a shelter that I can take unconditionally and a source of love. Family has deep impacts on the individual. It is the most important factor in becoming a social being. There would have been no places for which we would feel a sense of belonging if family had not existed. Having self-confidence has a key role in finding

a place in the society. Our first teachers are our parents. Therefore, they are always helpful to us in making critical decisions.”

P2: “Family is the most precious asset in my life. It means sharing and trust to me because one learns to feel trust and to share for the first time in family. Everything begins and goes on in family. We have our first experiences, and fine emotions such as love, loyalty, trust, compassion, sharing are experienced in family.”

P3: “Family means breath to me because family is like breath which is the fundamental of life. Just like breath represents living, family means the same to me. Without family, everything is missing; family is as close as breath even though one is away from it. Knowing that they are always beside me in my worst moments like giving me breath is reassuring. I thank my family for giving me breath.”

Next, the participants completed the sentence “The person that I will decide to marry should have ..... because .....” and then the answers were coded and categorized. Table 2 displays the related information.

**Table 2.** Participants’ Views on The Attributes of The Person They Want to Marry

Code	Category	N
Respectful towards me and my family		10
Respectful towards others’ opinions and rights		31
Honest and trustworthy		30
Compassionate and helpful	Having high moral values	16
Caring for nature and animals		6
Faithful		3
Complaisant		5
Polite and tolerant		19
Supportive in hard times		7
Having unconditional love		15
Devoted to his/her family	Spiritual and devoted to family values	17
Responsible		3
Believer		3
Prolific		2
Intelligent and open to innovations		4
Having a good job		2
Entertaining	Attractive	8
Earnest		4
Clean and well-groomed		2
Rational		5

As observed in Table 2, three categories as having high moral values, spiritual and devoted to family values, and attractive were extracted from the participants’ statements. 120 statements referred to moral values, 45 statements indicated spiritual and devoted to family values, and 27 statements explained attractiveness. These results indicate that a great part of the participants expect the person they want to marry to have high moral values. Some of the participants’ views are as follows:

P7: "I am looking for someone to marry who is respectful, honest, polite, moral, and prolific. I want him/her to be honest because it is important for a firm family bond. Reciprocal honesty is quite important in strengthening this bond. It brings happiness and peace. Trusting each other is another merit in setting family bonds. Partners should trust each other so that they can have peace."

P32: "I expect the person I want to marry to be overjoyed, care for animals and nature, be able to communicate decently and respectfully, and be considerate and compassionate. I believe that I own these attributes and I want the person I wish to marry to have these attributes too. I hope to be like Tweedledum and Tweedledee."

P57: "I expect the person I want to marry to be religious, fearful of God, to be grown up decently and devoted to family, to care and support in my hard times, to be moral, respectful, trustworthy, honest, humble and tolerant because one having no fear of God is potentially a wrongdoer. One who is inconsiderate and offending cannot have these mentioned attributes, I believe. That is why I care much that he/she has to have these."

The participants completed the sentence "It is important to start a family because ..." and then the answers were coded and the categorized. Table 3 displays the related information.

**Table 3.** Participants Views on the Importance of Starting a Family

Code	Category	N
By nature, one has to have a partner to share life.		37
One needs to love and be loved.	Human nature and faith	20
We must marry and start a family by our belief.		6
Family is the reason for existence.		3
Family is the essence and basis of the society.		11
We must have children and raise them to be beneficial to society.	Social basis	17

Table 3 displays two categories extracted, namely human nature and faith and social basis, drawing on the participants' views marrying and starting a family. 66 statements indicated human nature and faith while 28 statements pointed to social basis. Accordingly, the participants may be said to relate the importance of marrying and starting a family mostly to human nature and faith. Some of the participants views are as follows:

P5: "It is important to marry and start a family because one cannot live alone. He/she always wishes for someone to be with when he/she has fear, sorrow or joy, that is, in every emotion. Even if he/she can endure loneliness, he/she needs family in a certain period of life. Family stands by the person every time."

P19: "It is important to marry and start a family because human being was created with a soul match. God does not allow anyone to be alone. The Quran shows us our Prophet Mohammed as the best example for a proper life. His exemplary personality also reflects in

family life. The Prophet attached great importance to family and always encouraged to start a family because family is the place where the individual, partner and children can find peace. Family is also like a shield protecting the person from evil and sins. This is why the Prophet advised youngsters to start a family when they are at the age of marriage. As he noted: "Wedding is my tradition. Whoever does not practise my tradition is not my follower." Therefore, I believe starting a family is very important."

P41: "It is important to marry and start a family because God alone exists in solitude. It is essential to share the same house and make mutual decisions with your beloved. It is also essential to have and raise children beneficial to society. It is necessary to have a peaceful and happy home with your beloved to spend a life with love, respect and sharing."

Next, the participants were asked the question "Is having a child necessary to become a true family? Explain the reason why." The answers were then coded and categorized. Table 4 displays the related information.

**Table 4.** Participants' Views on the Importance of Having a Child to Become a True Family

Code	Category	N
It charges partners responsibility.		9
Child is the joy and bond of home.	Yes	10
Maternity-paternity is sacred.		4
If two people are happy and peaceful, then they are family.		31
Without being mature enough, one should not have a child.	No	15
Child is not a means of happiness; they should be made happy instead.		10
Economic status should be taken into account.	Partially	2
Child strengthens the bond within, it is complementary.		11

As seen in Table 4, three categories as yes, no and partially were created regarding the participants' statements on the role of having a child in becoming a family. 23 statements indicated yes, 56 statements referred no, and 13 statements explained partially. Thus, most of the participants thought that having a child is not a precondition to become a family. Some of the participants' statements are as follows:

P13: "I do not think that having a child means becoming a family. If partners love and trust each other, they are literally family in anyways. Having a child just makes us mothers and fathers. It makes family stronger."

P15: "It is necessary to have a child to become a family. Family is comprised of mother, father and children. Becoming a family entails a lot of duties, and having a child brings about

both financial and moral responsibilities. Also, parents help raise new generations by having children. Some partners cannot have children because of physiological reasons but they can also be good families by adopting.”

P36: “I think if two people love each other and want to start a family, having a child is not compulsory. Child is the joy of home but some partners cannot have children. No matter how worried they are, they should overcome this by strengthening their bonds. I think it is enough for partners to love each other, be loyal and respectful to become a family.”

Lastly, the participants’ answers to the question “Is love necessary alone to become a family? Explain the reason why” were coded and categorized. Table 5 displays the related information.

**Table 5.** Participants’ Views on the Importance of Love in Becoming a Family

Code	Category	N
Love gets over everything	Yes	4
Respect, trust and loyalty are fundamentals		40
Partners should be aware of their responsibilities	No	7
Financial status matters		11

The participants’ answers to the question created two categories as yes and no. 4 statements indicated yes while 58 statements referred to no meaning that the participants mostly thought that love alone is not enough to become a family. Some of the participants’ statements are as follows:

P19: “Of course it is important that partners love each other. However, it is a question whether love is enough to become a family. I think not. They should be supportive to each other both financially and morally, be respectful, have mutual tastes, enjoy spending time together, that is, they should be complementary. If there are violent, scorning, mocking attitudes and behaviors between them, they cannot keep it together. I guess we all agree that divorcing is not the most enjoyable thing in the world. It is obvious that no one gets married to think about divorcing in the future but wrong choices create wrong marriages and thus bad consequences. This is why love alone is not enough to become a family.”

P43: “I believe love is enough to start a family because love matters so much. Life is meaningless without love. If there is love in a family, the rest is handled. Love is like water for the family; it withers without it. Without love, there will be no loyalty, quarrels appear causing families to break up. Quarrels can even lead to murders.”

P52: “Love alone may not always be enough to become a family. It is no doubt that love comes first but it may not provide necessary conditions alone. Moral values such as consideration, respect, and honesty are also needed. Becoming a family is complete when a number of spiritual factors besides love come together.”

#### 4. Conclusions, Discussion and Suggestions

Family is sincerity, an unbreakable wall in front of children, a mother’s safe arms, the source of love and respect, the place where our dreams are born and sprout; it is crying and laughing

together, sharing your meal, trouble, and life, it is loyalty, sacrifice, in brief the most precious treasure, it is breath. With this, young people's ideas about marriage matter a lot. Thus, it is necessary to find out their opinions, define their expectations, be guide and role model to them, and understand them. It is essential that elder people be a good model to and counsel them for a better future and a sound generation. The current study presented authentic results in examining undergraduates' perspectives on the concepts family and marriage.

The participants' perspectives on marriage showed that it associated moral values and feelings, a precious entity and mostly complete trust. The participants regarded family as a unity which they know they own in any circumstances, includes everything to be happy, orients the society, shares anything with them, and which is a source of sacrifice, loyalty and sincerity. What the participants expect of the person that they want to marry showed that they wanted a person who is moral and devoted to family values and who is attractive. They stated that they look for someone who is respectful for their families, views, and rights, trustworthy and fair, compassionate, helpful, polite, tolerant, congenial, devoted to family, and responsible and they want an unconditional love and support in hard times. What they most minded was that the person they look for to marry should have high moral values. The participants' perspectives on starting a family referred to human nature, faith and social basis. The participants related the importance of starting a family mostly to human nature and faith, and attached importance to loving and being loved, having a partner and raising children beneficial to society. These findings show parallelism with various studies examining statements about marriage and partner choice (Avci, 2014; Bener & Günay, 2013; Buss & Barnes, 1986; Hamamcı, Buğa & Duran, 2011; Karadağ, 2006; Manning, Longmore & Giordano, 2007; Ümmet, 2017; Wiederman & Allgeier, 1992).

The participants' perspectives on the importance of having a child to become a family mostly showed that they do not think of having a child as a precondition to become a family, and that living in peace is what matters in an ideal togetherness. The results also showed that the participants are of the opinion that one should not have children until they are mature enough, children should not be seen as a means of happiness, and they should be made happy instead. At the same time, it should also be considered that it is necessary to have children for a firm family bond since having children brings about responsibility, and they are a source of joy, and strengthen the bond between partners. Aside from the current study results, Türkaslan (2007) and Demirci et al. (2005) found that divorce rate was lower among partners with children compared to the ones with no children. Bradbury, Finchani and Beach (2000) stated that number of children has an impact on marriage. Similar to the current study results, Özbuçak and İpek (2019) and Erdinç (2018) found that partners with no children were happier than partners with children. On the other hand, Uzel (2015) found that having children had no effect on a harmonious and peaceful marriage.

The participants' views on the necessity of love for being happy mostly indicated that love is not enough alone to be happy in the absence of respect and loyalty, and feeling of responsibility and financial status also matter. Özbuçak and İpek (2019), Yıldırım (2018) and Erdinç (2018) found that partners who have love match are more harmonious than the ones married without loving each other.

Basing upon the results, following suggestions may be made:

- (i) The current study was conducted with 61 undergraduates matriculating at Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University, Turkey. Following studies may be done with more participants studying at various programs and departments in several universities in a way to encompass the subject university in general.

- (ii) The study is limited to opinions of participants on family and marriage. Further studies can be done on undergraduates' opinions about examining parents and academicians' opinions on family and marriage.
- (iii) The study is limited to 5 open-ended questions. The number of open-ended questions may be increased.
- (iv) The results may set an example to families and academicians in guiding and supporting students and to students in becoming aware of their conceptions on marriage. Accordingly, efficient and brief seminars could be provided for students and parents.
- (v) It may also be necessary to know about the young who are expected to raise future generations and if necessary, additional measures can be taken.

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