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Investigation of Marital Satisfaction in terms of Proactive Personality, Meaning in Life, Offense-Specific Forgiveness

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to investigate marital satisfaction with respect to proactive personality, meaning in life, and offense-specific forgiveness in marriage. Research data were collected from 350 married using the, Marital Offence-Specific Forgiveness Scale (MOFS), Satisfaction with Married Life Scale, Proactive Personality Scale, and Meaning in Life Questionnaire. The data were analyzed with regression and Pearson correlation coefficient to test the hypotheses of this research. The results showed that there is a positive correlation between marital satisfaction and meaning in life and proactive personality. It is also concluded that there is a negative correlation between marital satisfaction and resentment-avoidance, one of the sub-dimensions of offense-specific forgiveness in marriage. According to the regression analysis in the study, proactive personality, meaning in life, and resentment-avoidance variables, which are sub-dimensions of offense-specific forgiveness in marriage, were found to predict marital satisfaction significantly.

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Keywords:

Marital satisfaction, proactive personality, meaning in life, offense-specific forgiveness in marriage

1. Introduction

When human life is considered, the majority of people's lives seem to be spent within the marriage process. The marriage bond affects the individual in many aspects. It is stated that marriage enables the fulfillment of essential needs such as belonging, loving, and being loved, allowing the person to survive (Çelik, 2012). It is emphasized that individuals expect to be happy when they step into marriage (Derebaşı, 2004). The fulfillment of this expectation determines satisfaction and gratification obtained from marriage (Üncü, 2007). In addition, another critical point is that marital satisfaction affects the psychological status of individuals (Güven, 2005). A good and strong marital relationship is the key to a happy life and psychological well-being (Amato & Keith, 1991). Backing this hypothesis, Tufan Çetin (2010) concluded that individuals with higher fulfillment in their marriage had higher life satisfaction and were less likely to experience depression. Another study concluded that individuals with high marital satisfaction had lower blood pressure and stress levels, slept better, and went to see a doctor fewer times (Craig & Olsen, 1995). In summary, marital satisfaction is a crucial variable contributing to both the biological and psychological health of individuals.

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The social institution of family, which is the core of the society, is based on the fact that two adult people, a man, and a woman, are in a long-term, satisfying relationship (Levinger & Huston, 1990). Marriage is described as creating an environment where two people come together and fulfill their needs (Erbek et al., 2005). While marriage is a root of joy and satisfaction for some people, it may bring many negativities for some people. It is considered that having an unhappy and dissatisfied marriage may be negatively related to life satisfaction, general happiness, self-confidence, as well as general wellness (Laub et al., 1998). The findings of researches reveal that the high marital satisfaction of couples positively affects the mental and physical health of the spouses (Mascaro & Rosen, 2005; Taş, 2011). The increase in divorce rates affects not only the families, i.e. the couples and their children, but it also affects the general society. While happy and satisfying marriages ensure the welfare of couples and their children, they also play an important role by contributing to the general peace of society (Bradbury et al., 2000). In this context, it is significant for individuals to get satisfaction from their marriage to maintain the marriage union and not result in divorce (Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004). From this perspective, studies on marital satisfaction are considered necessary in providing an opportunity for couples to develop some interventions to prevent marital problems and divorce for the benefit of society through healthy marriages and the welfare of the individual and the family (Bradbury et al., 2000).

Conflict is an inevitable relationship experience, and all couples are faced with coping with conflict (Marchand, 2004). It is emphasized that solving problems is more important than conflict in the marital relationship (McCabe, 2006). People with proactive personalities are regarded to be willing to talk about disagreements, think flexibly, and constructive problem-solving skills are essential for them in terms of marital satisfaction. Besides problem-solving skills, meaning in life might have an impact in marital satisfaction. It is believed that the meaning of life is a motivational tool that provides the rhythm of life. In this context, Frankl (1963) stated that individuals who do not have meaning in their lives will be meaningless, unplanned, and aimless. Literature points out that individuals who make their life meaningful have positive emotions, so they consider themselves happy and satisfied in life (Hicks & King, 2007). In addition, people who want to make their lives meaningful need others. In this respect, it is thought that there may be a correlation between marital satisfaction and the meaning of life. Another important consideration with regard to marital satisfaction is forgiveness. Although marriage is a root of joy and contentment for individuals, it can also be a source of problems and conflicts (Güven & Sevim, 2007). For a happy marriage and consequently a happy life, the ability to forgive in marriage is considered essential. Fenell (1993) states that in long-lasting marriages, the partners' behaviours to forgive and ask for forgiveness have a significant contribution to their marital satisfaction and the longevity of their marriage.

Family, marriage and romantic relationships in the literature review of the information obtained as a result of a general review of personality traits (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Cihan-Güngör, 2007), forgiveness (Çitil & Durmuş, 2015; Fincham & Beach, 2002), psychological factors closely related to mental health, such as the meaning in life (Mascaro & Rosen, 2005; Taş, 2011) can be concluded that marital satisfaction and the quality of marriage relationship is important. From a general review of literature about family, marriage and romantic relationships, it can be concluded that personality traits (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Cihan-Güngör, 2007), forgiveness (Çitil & Durmuş, 2015; Fincham & Beach, 2002), psychological factors closely related to mental health, such as the meaning in life (Mascaro & Rosen, 2005; Taş, 2011) are influential in marital satisfaction and the quality of marriage relationship. Furthermore, marriage is a joint life where two people combine their lives. It is an institution that accepts and aims to be happy. Satisfaction in marriage is highly significant to realizing each other's expectations and for individuals to be happy. It is known that marriages with a lack of satisfaction can result in divorce, negatively affecting both spouses and children, especially nowadays, when divorce rates are increasing. Therefore, this research investigated the relationship between proactive personality, meaning in life, and forgiveness in marriage and marital satisfaction, which are thought to be substantial determinants of marital satisfaction.

1.1. Marital Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction can affect the dynamics of the connection between couples and all individuals in the family. Marital satisfaction is defined as a situation involving married individuals' mutual interactions and subjective evaluation of all emotional and cognitive experiences in marriage (Collard, 2006). It is stated that the communication style of the spouses, the language of love, and sexual satisfaction are important elements

influencing marital satisfaction in the functioning of the marriage relationship (Sokolsi & Hendrick, 1999). Marital satisfaction is thought to be considerably related to life fulfillment, happiness, subjective well-being, and resilience (Çelik, 2012; Heller et al., 2006). In addition, studies found that depression and sexual dysfunction were high in individuals with low marital satisfaction, and their quality of life was negatively affected (Güleç, 2012; Hünler & Gençöz, 2003).

In addition, marital satisfaction was negatively affected due to insufficient submissive behaviours to solve problems between spouses (Hünler & Gençöz, 2003), whereas marital satisfaction was positively impacted in individuals using collaborative conflict resolution methods (Greeff & Bruyne, 2000). In the research studies on marital satisfaction; job satisfaction of married individuals (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005); high self-efficacy and self-regulation (Cihan-Güngör, 2007); being open to development (Bouchard et al., 1999), and having meaning in life (Güven, 2005; Taş, 2011) positively correlated with marital satisfaction; while unrealistic relationship expectations (Güven, 2005) neuroticism (Karney & Bradbury, 1997), hedonistic personality traits (Najarpourian et al., 2012), depression (Cohan & Bradbury, 1997), and stress (Craig & Olsen, 1995) were found to be negatively related. As observed in the literature, a large body of research examined the connection between personality traits and marital satisfaction. However, no studies have investigated the relationship between marital satisfaction and proactive personality.

1.2. Proactive Personality

People who have a proactive personality can influence and alter the environment (Bateman & Crant, 1993), take individual responsibilities, and deal with different solutions to eliminate the problem (Gupta & Bhawe, 2007). Studies conclude that the proactive personality trait is related to being determined (Crant, 2000), having extrovert and leading characteristics (Bateman & Crant, 1993), and success in career (Seibert et al., 1999). Instead of accepting the conditions they face while creating change, proactive people take action by taking advantage of opportunities rather than emotions (Seibert et al., 1999). When the studies on marital satisfaction as well as proactive personality are evaluated together, it is seen that both variables are related to factors such as being open to innovation, being extroverted and empathic, being able to express their feelings, and having problem-solving skills. Therefore, it is assumed that there may be a positive connection between marital satisfaction and proactive personality in the present research.

1.3. Meaning in Life

The meaning in life, which is a crucial motivation tool for individuals' subjective well-being, can also be a structure that facilitates adaptation. The meaning in life, which encourages people to get out of inertia and takes their primary responsibilities towards their own goals, is seen as a psychological necessity. According to Frankl (1963), one can find it in three ways; by creating work, developing an attitude towards pain, and interacting with a human being. When subjective well-being, one of the concepts related to meaning in life, is analyzed, it is understood that increased life satisfaction and happiness are reported in married individuals (Taş, 2011). What life means for us is also connected with our mood, while meaninglessness is associated with mental disorders. In literature, however, the connection between meaning of life and marital satisfaction has not been investigated. Studies examined the connection between close relationships and the meaning sought in life; and the findings suggest that while the meaning level increases in life, a considerable amount of focus on relationship satisfaction and self-confidence increase in the relationship (Güven, 2005). The meaning in life may also be related to marital satisfaction in married individuals because both variables are related to concepts such as hope, satisfaction, psychological well-being, and forgiveness as positive mood states.

1.4. Offense-Specific Forgiveness in Marriage

Forgiveness can have a positive effect on overcoming stressful experiences in human life. The concept of forgiveness is described as an attempt to improve good skills such as kindness, helpfulness by deliberately getting rid of the negative emotions against the person whose feelings such as anger and vengeance are felt (Bugay & Demir, 2011). The concept of forgiveness, which is essential in maintaining relations without harm, has been examined in romantic relationships (Reed & Enright, 2006) and marriage relationships (Ezerçe, 2016; Paleari et al., 2005). To forgive each other in married individuals, negative emotions such as payback and rage are replaced by good feelings such as trust and hope. Therefore, forgiveness can be used as an

intervention method to solve marital problems (Gordon & Baucom, 2003). In addition, forgiveness increases the quality and continuity of family relationships (Fichman, 2015; Kato, 2016).

Through resentment and avoidance behaviours in marriage, couples tend to avoid resolving the conflict verbally and directly. Resentment and avoidance in marriage can be understood by many indicators such as avoiding talking, keeping physical distance, avoiding eye contact, and being silent. Therefore, it can be said that resentment and avoidance can affect satisfaction in marriage negatively (Fincham, 2003). On the other hand, forgiveness in marriage facilitates conflict resolution between couples, and it increases life satisfaction by moving away from negative feelings. Gordon and Baucom (2003) state that forgiveness is a crucial point for recovery in relationships, and they identify three components for forgiveness to occur. These involve a pragmatic and rational perspective of a relationship that sees the whole picture; a decreased desire for negative thoughts and punishment towards the partner; and the reorganization or restructuring of beliefs about the relationship and the partner.

2. Method

2.1. Research Model

The study was conducted with the relational survey method. Karasar (2006) stated that investigating a former or current state without intervention can be achieved with this research method. In this context, the relationships between marital satisfaction, proactive personality, meaning in life, and offense-specific forgiveness in marriage were analyzed in the current study with this technique.

2.2. Participants

The participants consisted of 350 married individuals (252 female and 98 male) who were willing to take part in the research. Participants were determined by the convenience sampling method. This method allows collecting data from individuals who want to participate voluntarily and are easily accessible. Furthermore, the research data were collected online.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

Satisfaction with Married Life Scale. This scale improved by Diener et al. (1985) was remodelled by Johnson et al. (2006) as satisfaction with married life scale. It was adapted to Turkish by Çelik (2014). It has a single factor consisting of five items with a 7-point Likert type scoring. In the study where the measurement was adapted to Turkish, the exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis implemented to decide the availability of the scale's structure showed that the Turkish form was consistent with the original element's structure. In the confirmatory factor analysis, the Chi-square test result ($\chi^2 = 7.08$, $SD = 5$, $p = 0.21$) was significant, and fit indexes were acceptable (RMSEA = .03, SRMR = .01, CFI = 1.00, AGFI = .97, and GFI = .99). The internal consistency coefficient was found to be .85.

Proactive Personality Scale. The scale developed by Bateman and Crant (1993) was adapted to Turkish by Akin et al. (2011). It has a single factor consisting of 10 items with a 7-point Likert-type scoring. Confirmatory factor analysis to determine the availability of the measurement in the Turkish adaptation study indicated that the Turkish form of the scale had an acceptable level of fit index ($\chi^2 / df = 1.65$, $p = 0.01502$, RMSEA = .044, SRMR = .033, CFI = .99, AGFI = .95, GFI = .97, and NFI = .99). The internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be .86.

Meaning in Life Questionnaire. The scale developed by Steger et al. (2006) was adapted to Turkish by Akin and Taş (2015). It has a two-factor structure (present meaning and expected meaning) consisting of 10 items with a 7-point Likert type scoring. In the adapted study, it was observed that the fit indexes obtained for the the structure of the scale were within the acceptance range ($\chi^2 = 77.77$, $df = 31$, $p = 0.00001$, RMSEA = .065, SRMR = .065, AGFI = .93, GFI = .96, and CFI = .97). In the Turkish version of study, the internal consistency coefficients calculated for the scale's reliability were found to be .77 for the present meaning in life subscale, .83 for the expected meaning in life subscale, and .81 for the whole scale.

Marital Offence-Specific Forgiveness Scale (MOFS). The scale was designed by Paleari et al. (2009), and it was adapted to Turkish by Akin et al. (2012). The scale has a two-factor structure (resentment-avoidance and benevolence) consisting of 10 items with a 6-point Likert type scoring. The results of the CFA to decide the

availability of the scale in the Turkish adaptation were found to be within the acceptance range of the factor structure of the scale ($\chi^2 = 82.16$, $df = 30$, $RMSEA = .084$, $SRMR = .057$, $GFI = .94$, and $CFI = .96$).

2.4. Data Analysis

Regression and Pearson correlation coefficient were used to test the hypotheses of the research. In this context, the research data were first examined in terms of the normal distribution and regression analysis assumptions, and the data of 13 participants that disrupted the normal distribution were deleted. Skewness and kurtosis values and normal distribution graphs were examined to determine whether the data showed normal distribution, and whether the data were suitable for regression analysis were tested by VIF (Variance Increase Factor Method), CI (Conditional Index Number Method), and correlation coefficients between variables. The results of normal distribution and regression analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics, Findings Regarding Normal Distribution and Multiple Regression Assumptions

	N	\bar{X}	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	VIF	CI
Marital Satisfaction	337	24,6499	6,21554	-,615	,001		1,000
Proactive Personality	337	46,2938	10,22368	-,221	-,278	1,087	6,658
Meaning in Life	337	51,8427	7,31979	-,686	,619	1,076	7,811
Resentment-Avoidance	337	18,1751	7,13114	,183	-,748	1,127	12,911
Benevolence	337	14,2404	4,98317	-,183	-,670	1,123	22,658

2.5. Ethical

In this study, all rules stated to be followed within the scope of “Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive” were followed.

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3. Findings

Pearson correlation coefficient was used to investigate whether marital satisfaction is related to proactive personality, meaning in life, and sub-dimensions of forgiveness in marriage (resentment-avoidance and benevolence). The findings of the analysis are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis and Descriptive Statistics Results

	1	2	3	4	5
Marital Satisfaction (1)	1				
Proactive Personality (2)	.185**	1			
Meaning in Life (3)	.231**	.262**	1		
Resentment-Avoidance (4)	-.491**	.098	-.004	1	
Benevolence (5)	-.087	.083	.044	.326**	1
Mean	24.65	46.29	51.84	18.17	14.24
SD	6.22	10.22	7.32	7.13	4.98

** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$

As Table 2 indicates, the relationships of marital satisfaction with proactive personality ($r = .185$, $p < .01$) and with meaning in life ($r = .231$, $p < .01$) were positively. It is also identified that there is a statistically significant negative relationship with the resentment-avoidance variable ($r = -.491$, $p < .01$), which is one of the sub-dimensions of forgiveness in marriage. However, as shown in Table 2, the correlation analysis revealed no statistically important connection between marital satisfaction and benevolence. Multiple regression analysis was used to see if marital satisfaction is predicted by proactive personality, meaning in life, or sub-dimensions of forgiveness in marriage (benevolence and avoidance-forgiveness). The analysis results are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analysis Result

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	B	B	β	t	p	F	R ²
	Constant	18.895	2.286		8.264	.000		
	Proactive Personality	.113	.028	.186	3.972	.000		
Marital Satisfaction	Meaning in Life	.150	.040	.177	3.802	.000	40.832	.330
	Resentment-Avoidance	-.461	.042	-.529	-11.088	.000		
	Avoidance	.077	.059	.062	1.295	.196		

As demonstrated in Table 3, it is observed that marital satisfaction is predicted by proactive personality ($\beta = .186$, $p < .001$), meaning in life ($\beta = .177$, $p < .001$) and resentment-avoidance ($\beta = -.529$, $p < .001$); but it was not predicted by benevolence ($\beta = .062$, $p > .05$).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined marital satisfaction with regard to proactive personality, meaning in life, and offense-specific forgiveness in marriage. As a result of the research, it was found that there is a positive connection between marital satisfaction and proactive personality and meaning in life. The findings of the study are consistent with the literature that analyzed the connection between marital satisfaction and meaning in life (Güven, 2005; Taş, 2011). However, studies investigating the connection between marital fulfillment and proactive personality could not be found. Proactive people can influence their behaviour, environment, and events (Bateman & Crant, 1993), always focus on the positive aspects of the events they encounter (Aybatan, 2018), take risks to create change and bear the responsibility of the risk taken (Bolino et al., 2010). It is also related to high self-esteem (Seibert et al., 1999) that helps to evaluate and successfully manage new situations and opportunities that develop outside the individual.

It is stated that people who are able to find the meaning of life can solve the problems they face efficiently by taking responsibility (Frankl, 2010), aiming to improve themselves continuously, and approaching change positively by playing an active role in the problems encountered. When the proactive personality and meaning in life variables are evaluated together, it can be concluded that individuals with proactive personalities and enjoying meaning in life are active in coping with the issues they face in life, taking responsibility and approaching life, and in changing more positively. In this context, both proactive personality and meaning in life are positively connected to marital fulfillment because individuals with these characteristics may be insensitive to the problems experienced in marital relationships instead of being insensitive to the problems in general and trying to take an active role. In addition, in this research, proactive individuals may have higher levels of marital satisfaction than non-proactive married individuals because of their ability to solve problems, to express their feelings, to establish quality relationships, to be open to innovation, and to be empathic. Hopeful and satisfying individuals with meaning in life demonstrate a positive connection between meaning in life and marital satisfaction since it makes it easier for them to be more constructive in the event of mismatch and conflict in marriage. Proactive individuals can be more sensitive to their own psychological demands such as love, interest, and properties as well as to those of their spouses. This situation may influence increasing marital satisfaction between spouses.

With reference to the literature, it is observed that some variables such as self-control, being open to improvement, and problem-solving skills are connected to marital fulfillment, proactive personality, and meaning in life. It is stated that in the marriage process when self-controlled individuals encounter a stressful situation, they take an active role to eliminate the problem, and their taking responsibility for this issue will increase the satisfaction of individuals from marriage (Bouchard et al., 1999). Botwin et al., (1997) found that marital satisfaction levels of individuals with high self-control were also high. In addition, it is stated that the self-control score is high in individuals with proactive personality characteristics who use coping skills positively in conflict in marital relationship. From this perspective, since self-control levels of proactive individuals will be high, it may be concluded that there is a connection between marital satisfaction and the proactive personality trait. Effective use of stress resistance and coping skills (Edwards & Holden, 2001), acting with a sense of responsibility (Akin & Taş, 2015), and being self-controlled (Bouchard et al., 1999) positively affect marital adjustment.

Once the literature is analyzed, it is seen that forgiveness is an important factor for marital satisfaction. Forgiveness in marriage is from a negative to a neutral or positive outlook towards the person who made a mistake, the response to the mistake itself, and its consequences (Fincham et al., 2005). It contains positive emotions such as compassion instead of revenge and payback to the other person (Karakaş, 2014), and it has positive reflections on the continuation of the marital relationship in couples (Fincham et al., 2002; Kato, 2016), improving the quality of life (Burchard et al., 2003). It is stated that thanks to the renewing and restorative effects of the relationships that are inherent in forgiveness, it reduces the damaging properties of the couple relationship and makes the relationship sustainable (Kaya, 2015). It was found that forgiveness was higher in individuals with higher relationship satisfaction (McCullough et al., 1998). This study indicates a negative connection between marital fulfillment and resentment-avoidance, one of the sub-dimensions of offense-specific forgiveness in marriage. When the literature is examined, the results of studies examining the relationship between forgiving guilt in marriage and marital satisfaction, marital adjustment and marital quality (Fincham et al., 2002; Fincham et al., 2006; Paleria et al., 2005) is consistent with the finding of this study. In addition, Paleari et al. (2009) found a negative relationship between resentment avoidance and empathy, marital quality, marital assistance, self-confidence, and life satisfaction. It is stated that it is crucial to decide how the damaged person in the relationship can regain trust, how to allow compensation to the damaged person, and what to do for a more reliable communication (Hargrave & Sells, 1997).

With respect to the studies on marital satisfaction and forgiveness in marriage, some other research results (Gordon & Baucom, 2003; Kato, 2016) show that forgiveness positively affects marital satisfaction. In some research results (Alpay, 2009; Ermumcu, 2014) it was found that forgiveness becomes more difficult as the severity of the damage increases, and there is a negative connection between having an insecure attachment style and forgiveness. In this study, it was found that there is no significant relationship between marital fulfillment and forgiveness in marriage. According to Williamson and Gonzales (2007), forgiveness has a complex structure involving many processes and many variables. Fincham et al. (2005) emphasized that forgiving someone does not mean forgetting, having no compromise and problem-solving behaviour (Sells & Hargrave, 1998). An individual's empathy with the injured person is an important factor in forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1998; Paleari et al., 2005).

On the other hand, Alpay's (2009) study revealed that empathy predicted forgiveness and that the avoidance behaviour increased as empathy decreased. However, there are many factors that affect forgiveness. Besides asking for forgiveness, the level of empathy in couples' relationships with each other is thought to be important in changing each other's perspectives and showing mutual understanding (Ermumcu, 2014). From this point of view, there may be a need for empathy, understanding, and problem-solving skills to find alternative solutions along with forgiveness, which may influence marital fulfillment.

In this study, the connections between marital satisfaction and proactive personality, meaning of life, and offense-specific forgiveness in marriage were investigated. This study aims to understand the factors affecting marital satisfaction, which are essential in having a healthy family structure, and to contribute to future psychological research. The use of measurement tools that the participants utilized to assess themselves, the small size of the study group, and the lack of a causal relationship between the variables discussed are the crucial limitations of this study. It is important for the generalizability of these findings that research is conducted on larger sample sizes. In line with the findings of this study, psychoeducation or group counseling services involving married couples can be developed by experts working in marriage to increase the marital satisfaction of married individuals. With these programs and supportive training, marital adjustment and satisfaction of married individuals can be improved, and the relationship quality can be strengthened.

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