Original Article

Predictors and Relationship Between Gender Perception and Family Sense of Belonging of Medical and Nursing Students: A University Sample in Turkey

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Abstract

Background: Family is the place where social, physical, and psychological development of individual starts first. Parents are thought to be children's primary sources of socialization about gender. Factors such as genetic inheritance from the family, previous experiences of learning shape the behaviors of individual.

Objective: The present study was conducted to investigate predictors and relationship between gender perceptions and family sense of belonging in university students and to evaluate the effect of their socio-demographic characteristics.

Methodology: This cross-sectional and descriptive study was conducted with 255 first-year students attending faculty of medical and department of nursing at a public university in Istanbul province. In order to collect data, "Student Information Form" which was prepared by the researchers, "The Perception of Gender Scale", and "Family Sense of Belonging Scale" were used.

Results: There was a statistically significant correlation between Family Sense of Belonging Scale and Perception of Gender Scale and students' age, place of birth, the longest residence place, the number of children in the family ($p < .05$). The students obtained a mean score of 70.23 ± 9.10 in overall Family Sense of Belonging Scale. Their total mean score from Perception of Gender Scale was 93.73 ± 18.03. It was found that there was a positive and significant correlation between Family Sense of Belonging Scale and Perception of Gender Scale.

Conclusions: There is a significant correlation between gender perception and family sense of belonging. In the present study, the students had high scores of the family sense of belonging and gender perception. The result of the present study is considered as a positive finding on behalf of individuals who will become a medical doctor and a nurse in the future. It is recommended to conduct similar studies with other groups of students and to involve education programs emphasizing the importance of gender equality in higher education.

Key Words: gender, gender perceptions, family, family sense of belonging, Turkey

Introduction

The concept of gender signifies personality traits, roles, and responsibilities of female and male which were socially identified (Yılmaz et al., 2009). Gender also includes expectations about how the society sees, perceives, and thinks individuals as women and men, along with their biological differences (Akın & Demirel, 2003). Role of gender includes personality traits and behaviors that are considered appropriate for female and male culturally (Yılmaz et al., 2009). In other words, role of gender is a cluster of social norms determining which behaviors are expected or considered appropriate based on gender. Gender roles may lead to equal rights, serious disadvantages, and discriminations between sexes (Khalil et al., 2016).

There are various elements that constitute the social structure. Parents, teachers, mass media are effective for not only socialization of child but also identification of gender role stereotypes of the individual (Secgin & Tural, 2011). Girls and boys have been raised according to certain roles during lifetime. In this situation, the most fundamental factor affecting gender stereotypes is seen to be socialization process. Individuals who we interact and social, economic, moral, and cultural thinking system of the society constitute biases and stereotypes during socialization process. Stereotypes are the most important factor for formation of discrimination, inequality, and attitudes for females and males (Altınova & Duyan, 2013). Gender discriminations shape lives of both females and males. Therefore, the way, ratio, representation, and appearance of females and males in the participation of social life in society are influenced by sense of gender which is considerably valid for that society (Ongen & Aytac, 2013). In the study conducted by Arditti, Godwin and Acanzoni (1991) on perceptions concerning sexual role characteristics, preferences, and parental behaviors of woman it was determined that women had a stronger correlation than their husbands in terms of sexual role characteristics of girls (Arditti, Godwin & Scanzoni, 1991). While a study conducted in Turkey it was found that mean stereotypes concerning gender roles were higher (more traditional) in female students than male students (Baykal, 1991); another study reported that compared to male students, female students had greater attitude regarding the fact that female and male have an egalitarian roles in the society and boys had a more traditional attitude (Ongen & Aytac 2013). In the study by Cetinkaya (2013) it was reported that attitude scores of girls about gender roles were higher than boys. Accordingly, girls were stated to have more egalitarian attitude concerning gender roles (Cetinkaya, 2013).

Family is the place where social, physical, and psychological development of individual starts first. Thanks to connection between family members and sense of belonging, individuals gain resiliency for numerous problems and acquire the coping ability. Belonging supports to recognize and know the environment where we born, grow, raise and its rules (Mavili, Kesen & Dasbas, 2014). Factors such as genetic inheritance from the family, previous experiences of learning, encouraging or prohibiting roles of physical and social environment shape the behaviors of individual (Calıskur & Aslan, 2013). Parents are thought to be children's primary sources of socialization about gender (Epstein & Ward, 2011). Several factors that influence attitudes and behaviors about sexual roles are exposed during childhood and adolescence. These attitudes and behaviors are generally learnt within the family at home first and then strengthened by peers, school experience, and television watching. Additionally, the strongest effect on development of gender role is seen in family environment where parents share their own beliefs about gender obviously and secretly (Witt, 1997). As the relevant literature was examined, there was no study investigating gender perception and family sense of belonging together. There are studies investigating gender roles of university students. In the light of these information, the present study was conducted to investigate the relationship between gender perceptions and family sense of belonging in university students and to evaluate the effect of their socio-demographic characteristics.

Methods

Study design

This cross-sectional and descriptive study was conducted with 255 first-year students attending faculty of medical and department of nursing at a public university in Istanbul province.

Sample

The population of the study consisted of the first-year students attending faculty of medical and department of nursing at a public university between March and May 2017 in 2016-2017 academic year. The sample group consisted of 255 students. The voluntary students who could speak Turkish and did not have any communication obstacle were included in the study.

Data collection

The data of the study were collected by receiving approval of ethics committee (Decision No:2017/0124) and the institutional permission from the university. The students were informed about the study and their consents were obtained, they were included in the study.

In order to collect data, "Student Information Form" with 17 questions which was prepared by the researchers, "The Perception of Gender

Scale", and "Family Sense of Belonging Scale" were used.

Student Information Form: It is a form prepared by the researchers in accordance with literature information. It includes questions to investigate socio-demographic characteristics of students.

Perception of Gender Scale: The Perception of Gender Scale was developed by Altınova and Duyan (2013), is a self-report assessment tool organized to assess gender roles and perceptions of individuals. The scale consists of one subscale and 25 items. While 10 of items are positive, 15 are negative. Individuals are asked to state five degrees of opinions including "I strongly agree (5), I agree (4), Neutral (3), I disagree (2), I strongly disagree (1) for the ideation indicated in the items of the scale which is a five-point likert type. Negative items are calculated reversely. Items 2, 4, 6, 9, 10, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 24, and 25, are negative and calculated reversely. Accordingly, the scores that can be obtained from the scale vary between 25 and 125 and high scores signify positive perception of gender. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the scale was calculated as 0.872. Higher reliability and validity of the scale in the present study showed that it can be used to identify gender perception of people (Altınova & Duyan, 2013). In the present study, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of Perception of Gender Scale was calculated as 0.93.

Family Sense of Belonging Scale: Family Sense of Belonging Scale, which was developed by Mavili, Kesen, and Dasbas (2015), is a measurement tool determining individuals' sense of belonging for their family. The scale is five-point likert type including 17 items. While 13 of the items are stated positively, 4 are stated negatively. Individuals are asked to state five degrees of opinions including "I strongly agree (5), I agree (4), Neutral (3), I disagree (2), I strongly disagree (1) for the ideation indicated in the items of the scale. Items 5, 7, 9, and 12 are negative and calculated reversely.   After completing the reversing process, sum of the items 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 17 measures "sense of self-belonging subscale", sum of items 2, 5, 8, 9, 16 measures "family sense of belonging". In addition, sum of both yields "total score of family sense of belonging". Scores to be obtained from Family Sense of

Belonging Scale vary between 17 and 85. Higher scores signify higher family sense of belonging. Internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) of the scale was calculated as 0.94. Cronbach's Alpha was 0.93 for sense of self-belonging subscale and 0.82 for family sense of belonging (Mavili, Kesen & Dasbas, 2014). Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated as 0.88 for Family Sense of Belonging Scale in the present study.

Ethical considerations

The data of the study were collected by receiving approval of ethics committee (Decision No:2017/0124) and the institutional permission from the university. The students were informed about the study and their consents were obtained, they were included in the study.

Data analysis

The data of the study were assessed by using "SPSS" (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) for Windows 22.0 program in the computer environment. Number, percentage ratio, mean, standard deviation, One Way-Anova Test, Independent-Samples T-Test, parametric, and correlation were used for data analysis. The level of p<0.05 was accepted as statistically significant.

Results

It was found that 77.3% of the students participating in the study were medical students and 22.7% were nursing students. 53.7% of the students were in the age range of 17-19 years, 99.2% were single, 96.1% were unemployed, 52.5% were born in the city, and 61.2% resided in the city for the longest time. The number of children in families of 74.5% was 2-4, nuclear family was the most common type of family (87.8%), and 51.0% were living with their families. While mothers of 32.6% of students were primary school graduates, 24.3% were university graduates. While fathers of 27.9% were primary school graduates, 39.3% were university graduates. 74.9% of mothers were unemployed; whereas, 78.8% of fathers were employed. 63.1% of the students reported that they were influential to choose their department, 86.3% chose the department willingly, and violence occurred in 17.3% of their families (Table 1)

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics of Students (n = 255).

Characteristics		n	%
Department	Nursing	58	22.7
	Female	49	19.1
	Male	9	3.6
	Medical	197	77.3
	Female	101	39.6
	Male	96	37.7
Age	17-19	137	53.7
	20-22	114	44.7
	23 and over	4	1.6
Marital status	Single	253	99.2
	Married	2	0.8
Working status	Working	10	3.9
	Not working	245	96.1
Place of birth	City	134	52.5
	Town	100	39.3
	Village	21	8.2
The residence place for the longest time	City	156	61.2
	Town	78	30.6
	Village	21	8.2
The number of children in the family	Single child	15	5.9
	2-4	190	74.5
	5 and over	50	19.6
Type of family	Nuclear family	224	87.8
	Extended family	27	10.6
	Fragmented family	4	1.6
Place of living	Besides his family	130	51.0
	Dorm	85	33.3
	Home (alone, friend, relative, sister)	40	15.7
Educational background of mother	Not literate	22	8.6
	Literate	14	5.5
	Primary school graduate	83	32.6
	Secondary school graduate	23	9.0
	High school graduate	51	20.0
	Graduated from a universty	62	24.3
Educational background of father	Not literate	7	2.7
	Literate	9	3.5
	Primary school graduate	71	27.9
	Secondary school graduate	21	8.2
	High school graduate	47	18.4
	Graduated from a universty	100	39.3
Employment of mother	Working	56	22.0
	Not working	191	74.9
	Retired	8	3.1
Employment of father	Working	201	78.8
	Not working	6	2.4
	Retired	48	18.8
The person being influential in choosing their department	Itself	161	63.1
	Family	78	30.6
	Environment	16	6.3
Willing to the department	Willingly chosen	220	86.3
	Unintentionally chosen	35	13.7
The presence of violence in the family	Yes	44	17.3
	No	211	82.7
TOTAL		255	100.0

Table 2. Subscale and Total Scores of Scales (n = 255).

Family Sense of Belonging Scale	Mean±Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Sense of Self-Belonging Subscale	51.75±6.83	24.00	60.00
Family Sense of Belonging	18.48±2.97	9.00	25.00
Total Score of Family Sense of Belonging Scale	70.23±9.10	38.00	85.00
Total Score of Perception of Gender Scale	93.73±18.03	48.00	125.00

Table 3. Comparison of Score Averages of Scales According to Descriptive Characteristics of Students (n = 255)

Characteristics		Family Sense of Belonging Scale		Perception of Gender Scale	
		Mean±Std. Deviation	p	Mean±Std. Deviation	p
Department	Nursing	72.12±8.62		100.22±16.01	
	Medical	69.68±9.19	0.073[*]	91.82±18.18	**0.002***
Age	17-19	71.18±8.64		96.45±16.63	
	20-22	69.41±9.26	**0.047[**]**	90.50±19.20	**0.033****
	23 and over	61.50±15.15		92.75±19.32	
Marital status	Single	70.33±9.03		93.83±18.06	
	Married	57.50±13.43	**0.047[*]**	81.50±7.77	0.337*
Working status	Working	63.40±11.29		95.00±18.25	
	Not working	70.51±8.92	**0.015[*]**	93.68±18.06	0.821*
Place of birth	City	70.97±9.03		95.86±17.89	
	Town	70.50±8.55	**0.007[**]**	92.61±18.26	**0.035****
	Village	64.33±10.37		85.47±15.54	
The residence place for the longest time	City	70.77±9.32		95.83±17.64	
	Town	70.75±7.61	**0.008[**]**	91.61±18.22	**0.029****
	Village	64.33±10.75		86.00±18.02	
The number of children in the family	Single child	67.40±11.53		96.73±18.88	
	2-4	71.13±8.28	**0.026[**]**	95.38±17.93	**0.007****
	5 and over	67.68±10.71		86.56±16.67	
Type of family	Nuclear family	70.68±9.04		94.64±18.23	
	Extended family	67.14±9.58	0.104[**]	85.92±15.35	0.058**
	Fragmented family	66.00±5.09		95.50±13.17	
Place of living	Besides his family	70.75±8.48		95.67±16.77	
	Dorm	70.10±8.61	0.507[**]	90.31±17.96	0.097**
	Home (alone, friend, relative, sister)	68.85±11.80		94.67±21.29	
Educational background of mother	Not literate	69.31±9.64		85.50±19.89	
	Literate	63.64±9.41		81.92±15.39	
	Primary school graduate	70.13±8.83	0.108[**]	91.96±17.15	**0.003****
	Secondary school graduate	70.60±8.86		95.17±20.58	
	High school graduate	71.21±9.94		96.98±15.99	
	Graduated from a universty	71.25±8.25		98.48±17.78	
Educational background of father	Not literate	69.14±10.74		97.00±12.81	
	Literate	60.88±11.97		91.55±14.49	
	Primary school graduate	69.69±7.81	**0.047[**]**	89.23±18.11	0.228**
	Secondary school graduate	70.61±11.49		96.04±20.86	
	High school graduate	71.23±9.17		96.74±18.34	
	Graduated from a universty	71.00±8.71		94.99±17.57	
Employment of mother	Working	70.44±8.64		97.82±18.11	
	Not working	70.12±9.20	0.900[**]	92.09±17.66	**0.027****
	Retired	71.50±10.86		104.25±20.49	

Employment of father	Working	70.41±9.12		94.59±17.53	
	Not working	68.16±11.40	0.770**	75.50±16.64	**0.032****
	Retired	69.75±8.90		92.39±19.32	
The person being influential in choosing their department	Itself	71.51±8.59		94.58±17.64	
	Family	68.17±9.59	**0.013****	91.26±19.37	0.302**
	Environment	67.43±9.76		97.18±14.40	
Willing to the department	Willingly chosen	70.50±9.13		92.80±17.90	
	Unintentionally chosen	68.57±8.89	0.244*	99.60±18.03	**0.038***
The presence of violence in the family	Yes	64.47±1.68		90.86±19.28	
	No	71.44±0.56	**0.00***	94.33±17.75	0.247*

**:One Way-Anova Test.   *:Independent-Samples T-Test

The students obtained a mean score of 70.23±9.10 in overall Family Sense of Belonging Scale, 51.75 ± 6.83 from the sense of self-belonging subscale, and 18.48 ± 2.97 from family sense of belonging subscale. Their total mean score from Perception of Gender Scale was 93.73 ± 18.03. While scores to be obtained from Perception of Gender Scale varied between 25 and 125, scores to be obtained from Family Sense of Belonging Scale varied between 17 and 85 (Table 2).

It was found that there was a positive and significant correlation between Family Sense of Belonging Scale and Perception of Gender Scale ($r = .238$, $p < .01$). Gender perception of students with higher family sense of belonging was higher. Mean score of the nursing students from Family Sense of Belonging Scale and Perception of Gender Scale was higher compared to the medical students. Scale scores of those aged 23 years and over were higher than the age group of 17-19 years. Total mean scores of those who were single, born in the city, resided in the city for the longest time, were currently living with their families, whose mother was university graduate, whose mother was retired, who chose their department reluctantly, who had violence in their family, were higher for both scales. There was a statistically significant correlation between Family Sense of Belonging Scale and students' age, marital status, employment status, place of birth, the longest residence place, the number of children in the family, educational background of father, the person being influential in choosing their department, and the presence of violence in the family ($p < .05$).

A statistically significant correlation was determined between Perception of Gender Scale and department, age, place of birth, the residence place for the longest time, the number of children in the family, educational background of mother, employment of mother, employment of father, and willing to the department ($p < .05$) (Table 3).

Discussion

Family has important roles in formation and development of gender perception. The present study investigated the relationships between gender perception and family sense of belonging in university students and evaluated the effect of socio-demographic characteristics of students on perception of gender and family sense of belonging.

The study revealed a statistically significant difference between the departments of the students and their perception of gender. Gender perception of the nursing students was more positive than medical students. This difference may result from the content of courses students taken. Nursing, like medical, is a profession providing healthcare service to individuals without sex discrimination. One of the basic differences between both professions is that nursing is a care-based profession. This philosophy is considered to reflect on the perception of gender mainstreaming, too. In the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap report 2016 is understood that the field where gender equality is provided at highest rate is health in Turkey (WEF, 2016). Likewise, in their study Pesen et al., (2016) determined a significant difference between gender perceptions of the students based on the variable of their school type. The level of gender perception was examined between students attending Vocational Health School and Faculty of Theology and it was found in the behalf of students of Vocational Health School (Pesen et al., 2016).

There was a statistically significant difference between gender perception and family sense of belonging of the students in terms of the variable of age. With increasing age, scores of gender

perception and family sense of belonging decreased (23 year and over compared to the age group of 17-19 years). Flexibility occurs in stereotypes of gender roles when individual differences or non-habitual situations are recognized and questioning increases with adolescence. Nevertheless, social expectation for behaving appropriately to gender roles influences behaviors of adolescents. In this period, especially increased sexuality and relationships with opposite sex also support behaviors based on preexisting stereotypes (Kılıc et al., 2013). The students included in the study were in transition period from adolescence to adulthood. In addition, university environment makes them experience an increasing socialization process. This may weaken family sense of belonging by decreasing communication and interaction with the family.

A statistically significant difference was found between marital status and employment of students and their family sense of belonging. Family sense of belonging was higher in single and unemployed students. The fact that studentship was ongoing, almost all of the sample had nuclear family, and 76.7% were living with their family or in another house increases the communication with the family. This increased the sense of belonging by strengthening family bonds.

According to the study, place of birth, the residence place for the longest time, and the number of children in the family were effective ion both family sense of belonging and gender perception. This was found to be in behalf of students born in the city and those living in the city for the longest time; gender perception of these students was more egalitarian and their family sense of belonging was more positive. Likewise, in their study Ongen and Aytac (2013) indicated that the students born in the city had a more egalitarian attitude for gender roles compared to those born in rural area (Ongen & Aytac, 2013). It was thought that living in the city may lead to a more protective attitude in family relationships compared to living in the district or village, modern life may create a positive effect on gender inequality. Students' having different cultural structures was considered as another reason because the study was conducted at a university environment.

In the study, as the number of children in the family increased, sense of belonging decreased,

and their gender perception was influenced negatively. As the number of family members increases, interaction of family members with each other may decrease. Both gender perception and family sense of belonging of students from families with children up to 4 were developed positively.

There was a statistically significant correlation between mother's educational background and gender perception and between father's educational background and family sense of belonging in the study. Higher educational level affected positively gender perception and family sense of belonging. While educational level of parents play a role in formation of their feelings, thoughts, and attitudes, it was also effective on children. This affected gender perception and family sense of belonging of children, as well. In their study, Karaca et al., (2013) determined a significant difference between roles and communication functions of family in terms of educational background of mother as well as a significant difference in role functions of family in terms of educational background of father (Karaca et al., 2013). Aylaz et al., (2014) reported in their study that positive attitude scores of students having mothers with high educational level, for gender role were higher (Aylaz et al., 2014). In the study by Altuntas and Altınova (2015) it was found that while there was a significant difference between educational level and gender perception of women, there was no significant difference between educational level and gender perception of men (Altuntas & Altınova, 2015).

A statistically significant difference was found between employment and gender perception of parents. Low gender perception score of the students whose parents were unemployed made us think that employment of parent had a positive effect on gender mainstreaming. The results of the present study were similar to the results of the study by Ongen and Aytac (2013). Ongen and Aytac (2013) reported that employment or unemployment of mother affected gender roles of students and those whose mother was employed had a more positive attitude for gender (Ongen & Aytac, 2013).

Family sense of belonging was greater in students who reported that they were effective in choosing their department. Making own decision for choice of profession and being raised by having such responsibility improved the family sense of

belonging. The students having more egalitarian gender perception chose nursing or medical profession without their will. This may result from students' knowledge about the professions or negative experiences before they made choice.

The family sense of belonging of students raised in an environment involving family violence were affected statistically significantly. In other words, violence weakens individual's family sense of belonging. Kanbay et al., (2012) determined in their study that 44.1% of the students were exposed to violence by their parents in any period of their life and a considerable part of the sample had negative attitudes towards gender mainstreaming (Kanbay et al., 2012). In their study, Tuncel, Dundar and Pesken (2007) reported that 60.1% of the students were exposed to physical violence by their parents during their childhood (Tuncel, Dundar & Pesken, 2007). Kurt et al., (2017) stated in their study that 13.6% of the students were abused and neglected during their childhood, 43.5% were exposed to violence, and there was a statistically significant correlation between the states of witnessing violence and committing violence among students (Kurt et al., 2017). In families where violence is committed, every individual including children is influenced negatively by violence (Lok, Basogul & Oncel, 2016). Individuals may have a tendency to act of violence in their further life as violence occurs within and is learnt from family. It is important to include awareness training to prevent violence to raise consciousness of family members and the society.

The study revealed a statistically significant correlation between family sense of belonging and gender perception. Positive family sense of belonging may positively influence gender perception. Positive shares of parents with their children and displaying egalitarian gender roles within the family may strengthen sense of belonging and enhance gender mainstreaming.

Conclusion

There is a significant correlation between gender perception and family sense of belonging. In the present study, the students had high scores of the family sense of belonging and gender perception. The result of the present study is considered as a positive finding on behalf of individuals who will become a medical doctor and a nurse in the future. It is recommended to conduct similar studies with other groups of students and to involve education programs emphasizing the importance of gender equality in higher education.

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