HEMŞİRELİK ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN KIZ ÇOCUK EVLİLİKLERİNE
YÖNELİK TUTUMLARI ¹NURSING STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS FEMALE CHILD
MARRIAGES*Dilek AYGIN¹, Özge YAMAN², Hande AÇIL³, Ayşe ÇELİK YILMAZ⁴, Havva SERT⁵**¹⁻⁵ Sakarya University, Health Sciences Faculty, Department of Nursing, Sakarya / Türkiye**ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4620-3412¹, 0000-0001-6154-7278², 0000-0003-1351-4185³, 0000-0002-9085-4848⁴,
0000-0002-1658-6515⁵*

Öz: Amaç: Dünyada, 7 kızdan birinin 15 ile 19 yaş arasında evlendiği, toplamda ise her yıl yaklaşık 15 milyon kız çocuğunun evlendirildiği bilinmektedir. Bu çalışma, sağlık bilimleri fakültesi hemşirelik öğrencilerinin kız çocuk evliliklerine yönelik tutumlarını belirlemek amacıyla yapıldı. **Yöntem:** Tanımlayıcı nitelikte planlanan bu çalışma 2016-2017 Eğitim Öğretim döneminde bir kamu üniversitesine bağlı sağlık bilimleri fakültesinde öğrenim gören ve çalışmaya katılmaya gönüllü 432 hemşirelik öğrencisi ile yürütüldü. Veriler; sosyo-demografik özelliklerin bulunduğu 7 sorudan oluşan demografik bilgi formu ve “kız çocuk evliliklerine yönelik tutum ölçeği” ile toplandı. **Bulgular:** Öğrencilerin kız çocuk evliliklerine yönelik tutum ölçeğinden aldıkları toplam puan ortalaması 23±11,12 dir. Çekirdek aileye sahip olan öğrencilerin toplam ölçek puanları geniş aileye sahip olanlara göre anlamlı derecede daha düşük bulundu ($p<0.05$). Ailelerin 18 yaş altı kız çocuk evliliklerine yönelik tutumları “ne olumlu ne olumsuz” olanların ölçek puanları anlamlı derecede yüksek bulundu ($p<0.05$). **Sonuç:** Hemşirelik öğrencilerinin kız çocuk evliliklerine yönelik tutum ölçeğinden aldıkları puanların orta seviyede ve genel olarak kız çocuk evliliklerine bakış açılarının olumsuz olduğu söylenebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hemşirelik, Kız Çocuk Evlilikleri, Öğrenci, Tutum

Abstract: Aim: In the world, it is known that one of every 7 girls marry between the ages of 15 and 19, 15 million girls are married every year. This study was conducted to determine the attitudes of nursing students in the faculty of health sciences towards female children marriages. **Method:** This study was planned as a descriptive study and conducted with 432 nursing students who were students in a health sciences faculty of a public university during the 2016-2017 academic year and who volunteered to participate in the study. The data were collected with a demographic information form consisting of 7 questions on socio-demographic characteristics and “Attitudes towards Female Child Marriage Scale”. **Results:** The mean score of students for ‘Attitudes towards Female Child Marriage Scale’ was 23±11.12. The total scale scores of the students which had nuclear families were significantly lower compared to the students who had large families ($p<0.05$). The scale scores of the students whose parents had “neither positive nor negative” attitudes towards female children marriages were significantly higher ($p<0.05$). **Conclusion:** It may be said that the scores of nursing students for “Attitudes towards Female Child Marriage Scale” are in the middle level and their attitudes were generally negative towards female children marriages.

Key Words: Nursing; Female Child Marriage; Student; Attitude

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(1) *Corresponding Author: Hande AÇIL, Sakarya University, Health Sciences Faculty, Department of Nursing, Sakarya / Türkiye, hande@sakarya.edu.tr, Received: 23.08.2017, Accepted: 11.12.2017, Type of article (Research -Application) Conflict of Interest: None / “Yes Ethics Committee” “Kırıkkale University, Clinical Research Ethics Committee, Issue: 34671234/044/ Date: 28.02.2017*

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INTRODUCTION

In the world, it is known that one of every 7 female children marry between the ages of 15 and 19, 15 million female children are married each year (UNICEF, 2014). According to the general view accepted by international communities, a marriage before the age of 18 is considered to be a child marriage while a girl who marries before the age of 18 is considered a child bride (Aydin & Akay, 2017:39; Das, 2017:2; Svanemyr, Chandra-Mouli, Christiansen, & Mbizvo, 2012:31). Although child marriages are observed in both sexes, it is known that female children are more affected. When the statistics of world and Turkey are analyzed, 720 million female and 156 million male children were affected in the world while 27637 female and 1319 male children were affected according to official records (Svanemyr et al., 2012:31; TÜİK, 2016; UNICEF, 2014, 2017). According to the UNICEF report, now there are 700 million child marriages, these number are expected to reach 950 million by 2030 and 1.2 billion by 2050 (UNICEF, 2014, Fuel & Coskun, 2014: 5). Despite legal regulations and international awareness-raising for the reduction of child marriages, child marriages are expected to be still an important problem in the future.

Child marriages are the results of many reasons such as poverty, the belief that marriage will guarantee the child, social norms and re-

ligious rules (Shepherd, 2009: 38, UNICEF, 2017). There are many traumatic events such as adolescent pregnancies, division of school life, social isolation and violence in the children who have to bear the burden of marriage without being able to reach an adult without being ready for marriage physically, physiologically and psychologically, having children and many other similar responsibilities. Therefore, these negative processes cause individuals to experience serious biopsychosocial problems throughout their lives (Aktepe & Atay, 2017: 410-420, UNICEF, 2017).

Nurses who are likely to meet with child brides in clinic and field have important responsibilities in the prevention of child marriage and the solution and management of emerging problems because of their roles such as educator, guide, leadership, women's rightist and in problems (For example, prevention of adolescent pregnancies, teaching modern family planning methods) (Yakit & Coşkun, 2014: 8-9). For this reason, it is important to determine the attitudes of nurses towards this issue and to raise awareness about child marriages. This study was conducted to determine the attitudes of nursing students in the faculty of health sciences on female child marriages.

SCOPE of STUDY

Female child marriages are considered to be an important social problem worldwide. The

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girls who cannot take the responsibility for marriage and baby-sitting encounter many problems and have to cope with biopsychosocial problems that can affect their whole life. For this reason, it is important to determine the attitudes of nurses for this issue and to raise awareness about child marriages.

METHOD

This research study was planned as a school-based, descriptive study.

Study Population

This descriptive study was conducted with 432 nursing students in a faculty of health sciences of a public university during the 2016-2017 academic year, who voluntarily participated in the study.

Data were collected via the following instruments:

Information Form

The data were collected with a demographic information form consisting of 7 questions on socio-demographic features and “Attitudes towards Female Child Marriage Scale” which was developed by Kaynak et al. in 2016.

Female Child Marriage Scale

The scale consists of 12 items. The factor load of the four items (items 1, 3, 6 and 12) is negative and these items need to be reverse

encoded. The scores are between 12 and 72 points. As the score increases, the attitudes for female child marriages become positive and they mostly support these marriages.

Data Analysis

In the analysis of the data, Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test was used for normality distribution of independent variables while percentage, frequency, mean and standard deviation values were used for the descriptive informations. Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U, Chi-square tests were used for comparison.

Research Permission

The scale permission and written permission from the administration of the institution (Date and Number: 06 March 2017-044 / E.10869) were taken before the study.

Study Limitations

The fact that the study was conducted only in a faculty of health sciences can be considered to be a limitation of the study.

RESULTS

The mean age of the nursing students was 20.53 ± 2.01 (min-max: 17-35) and 38.4% of the students were in the 2. grade (24.1% of the students were in the 1. grade, 22.2% of the students were in the 3. grade, 15.3% of the students were in the 4. grade). When the-

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ir family structures were analyzed, 81.5% of them had a nuclear family while 18.5% had an extended family. It was determined that 55.3% of the participants lived in the city, 44.7% of them lived longer in the villages / towns/villages, and 77.1% of the participants had equal income and outcome. The ratio of the participants who had a family member who married before the age of 18 was 14.6%. When their degree of affinity was analyzed, it was found that 8.3% of them were mothers of the students, 1.5% of them were second degree relatives, and 4% of them were third degree relatives. 92.1% of the students' families had positive opinions on female child marriages (under the age of 18) is negative while 6% of the had "neither positive nor negative" opinions (Table 1).

The mean total score of the students for Attitudes towards Female Child Marriage Scale was 23.00 ± 11.12 (min-max: 12-67), this result means that they did not have positive attitudes for female child marriages, in other words they did not support marriage. However, it was found that the students still had positive opinions about some expressions which support female child marriage. These statements were "In some cases, girls may need

to get married before the age of 18.", "Getting married before age 18 can help protect girls from sinister people.", "If a girl finds the right person at an early age, marriage of a girl before the age of 18 can be supported.", "If a girl has a reliable spouse, she can marry before the age of 18 without a risk.". The percentages of the participants who agreed these statements weakly/strongly/absolutely were 24.1%, 20.1%, 18.8% and 18.7%, respectively (Table 2). This situation suggests that university students still do not have enough awareness about this subject. No significant difference was found between the students' grade, place of living, income status and total scale score ($p > 0.05$). The total scale scores of the students who had nuclear families were significantly lower compared to the students which had extended families ($p < 0.05$).

The scale scores of the families which had "neither positive nor negative" opinions about the marriage of girls under the age of 18 were significantly higher ($p < 0.05$). In this case, those who had extended families, who had neither positive nor negative opinions seem to have more positive attitudes towards female child marriage at a young age.

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Table 1. Sociodemographic Features (n=432)

	n	%
Age	Mean/sd =20.53 ± 2,01 (min=17 max=35)	
Grades		
1. grade	104	24.1
2. grade	166	38.4
3. grade	96	22.2
4. grade	66	15.3
Your Family Structure		
Nuclear	352	81.5
Extended	80	18.5
Opinion of Your Family about female child marriages under age 18		
Positive	8	1.9
Negative	398	92.1
Noncommittal	26	6
Where Have You Lived the Longest?		
Village/town/county	193	44.7
City	239	55.3
How do you express your income status?		
Income<Outcome	36	
Income=Outcome	333	77.1
Income>Outcome	63	
Are anyone in your family who get married before the age of 18?		
Yes	63	14.6
No	369	85.4

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Table 2. Attitudes towards Female Child Marriage Scale(n=432)

Attitudes towards Female Child Marriage Scale	No I do not agree	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Yes I agree
1. The female children under the age of 18 do not have the physical qualification necessary for marriage.	%4,2	%2,3	%3,2	%6,5	%15	%68,8
2. Early married girls can adapt to marriage and new life more easily.	%64,6	%16,7	%7,4	%4,4	%2,8	%4,2
3. I would not allow my daughter get married before the age of 18 in any case.	%4,9	%4,2	%2,8	%4,6	%17,4	%66,2
4. Getting married before the age of 18 can help the protection of girls from sinister people.	%57,6	%14,1	%8,1	%9,7	%2,5	%7,9
5. After a thorough search, candidates who want to marry a girl under 18 can be positively responded.	%61,8	%15,5	%4,9	%7,6	%4,2	%6
6. I am against the marriage of girls under the age of 18.	%7,2	%2,3	%3,5	%2,5	%13,4	%71,1
7. If a girl has a reliable spouse, she can marry before the age of 18 without a risk.	%56,7	%14,6	%10	%8,6	%6,2	%3,9
8. If she finds a right person at an early age, marriage of a girl before the age of 18 can be supported.	%58,1	%16,2	%6,9	%10	%4,6	%4,2
9. I see no harm in marriage of a girl before the age of 18, if she has mutual love, respect and understanding in her marriage.	%56,2	%16,7	%9,7	%7,9	%5,8	%3,7

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10. In some cases, girls may need to get married before the age of 18.	%50,5	%15,5	%10	%16,7	%4,2	%3,2
11. A girl can get married before the age of 18 if she does not want to continue her education.	%61,1	%15,7	%8,3	%8,1	%4,2	%2,5
12. Marriages of girls before the age of 18 is a social problem.	%7,9	%2,5	%4,9	%6,7	%14,1	%63,9

Table 3. Attitudes for Female Child Marriages According to Sociodemographic Informations (N=432)

Socio-demographic Features	Scale Order Mean	χ^2	p	z
Grade				
grade	214,95	3,924	0,270	
grade	205,49			
grade	220,69			
grade	240,55			
Opinion of Your Family about female child marriages under the age of 18				
Positive	299,06	40,438	0,000	
Negative	205,61			
Noncommittal	357,75			
Income Status				
Income<Outcome	228,90	1,353	0,508	
Income=Outcome	218,02			
Income>Outcome	201,36			
Family Structure				
Nuclear family	206,48	0,000		-3,526
Extended family	260,58

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Where Have You Lived the Longest?

Village/town/county	217,54	-0,156
City	215,66	0,876
Are anyone in your family who get married before the age of 18?		
Yes	235,87	-1,343
No	213,19	0,179

DISCUSSION

The frequency of female child marriages varies geographically and culturally, but female child marriage is an important social problem that causes similar problems in communities where such marriages are observed. Sexuality in the early ages, maternal and child health problems related with maternity, falling behind the men in education and employment, social exclusion, exposing more pressure and violence from husband and husband's family are the results of early marriages. (Yüksel Kaptanoğlu & Ergöçmen, 2012) In order to prevent the health risks related with child marriage, these marriages and causes should be prevented first. Nurses who have the responsibilities as the protection and development of women's health have a position which provide an important responsibility in the prevention of these marriages. In the study, the opinions of nursing education about girls' marriages were evaluated.

The factors as poverty, low level of education, traditional practices came to the foreground when the underlying causes of female child marriages were analyzed (Özcebe and Biçer, 2013). In addition, it was emphasized that the normal acceptance and legitimation of female child marriages by the society play a critical role in the continuity of these marriages (Çakır, 2013; Özcebe & Biçer, 2013). In this study, it was found that most of the students' families (92.1%) had negative opinions about the marriages of girls under the age of 18 years. On the other hand, the scale scores of the students whose families had "positive or negative" attitudes for the marriages of girls under the age of 18 years and who had extended families were significantly higher compared to the other groups. According to this result, it can be said that the students' attitudes and attitudes about these marriages are affected by their families which are the most basic units of their social environment.

In the study, a small part of the students had positive opinions about "marrying before the

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age of 18 years protect girls from sinister people in some cases” (12.2%). 20.9% of them supported ‘In some cases, girls may need to get married before the age of 18’. In a study conducted in Turkey, early marriage was found to be supported by the traditional practices such as the protection of the woman’s honor, the transfer of the woman’s economic burden on another, and the prestige gained by marriage for women and the family (Burcu et al., 2015). Families are considered to be a protective institution to save their daughter’s honor and prevention of premarital sexual intercourse (Yalkıt & Coşkun 2014). Substantially, it is observed that the girls who are married at an early age encounter many problems, therefore the protection prescribed by their parents actually harms these children.

Many negative consequences are encountered by child brides as a result of marriage such as education breaks, adolescent pregnancies, maternal deaths, stress/ depression, substance abuse, sexually transmitted infections, withdrawal from friends, lack of self-confidence and withdrawal from social activities (Mihçioğur, 2010). In the study conducted by Soyulu and Ayaz (2013), it was determined that 27.1% of the women who married when they were children, were exposed to emotional abuse/ exploitation and 14.6% of them were exposed to physical abuse/ violence by the person who married them.

81.3% of the student did not support the statement as “Girls marry in early ages can adapt more easily to marriage and new life”. The ratio of the students who support the expression as “The girls who are younger than the age of 18 years do not have the physical qualification for marriage” was 83.8%. It can be stated that the students who participated in the study had a high awareness of the negative effects of early marriages on girls. Aydın and Akay (2017) found that nursing students’ need knowledge related to the consequences of early marriage. In a study conducted in Pakistan, it was stated that women have insufficient knowledge about the risks of early marriage (Nasrullah et al., 2014). It is thought that differences between the results of the studies are due to the influence of cultural and social factors.

When the communities in which early marriages are observed, it is seen that such marriages are widely accepted in developing regions and the regions where patriarchal culture is dominant. In these societies, the parents or even family elders approve of child marriages because of several material or spiritual reasons. Mothers and children remain passive and silent concerning child marriages. The woman who is married without her own consent and who becomes mother, cannot express her feelings for the future of her own female child (Land 2015).

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Montazeri et al. (2016) reported that female children were not autonomous as a result of lack of adequate life skills including decision-making, problem solving, discussion and critical thinking skills, these are important factors which lead young girls to early marriage. The agreement rates of the students who participated in the study were low for the statements that affirm marriage at early ages. (74.3% of them disagreed with the statement that “a girl can marry before the age of 18, if she found the right person at an early age” and 72.9% of them who disagreed with the statement that “I see no harm in marriage of a girl before the age of 18, if she has mutual love, respect and understanding in her marriage.”). The rate of female child marriages varies from country to country. Central African countries such as Nigeria (75%), Chad (72%), Bangladesh (66%), Benin, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Congo, Arabian countries such as Jordan, East Asia and Pacific countries such as Indonesia and South Asia countries such as Philippines, Nepal and Bangladesh, Eastern Europe and Central Asia countries such as Armenia, Latin America and Caribbean countries such as Bolivia are considered to be the countries where child marriages are most prevalent in the world (UNFPA, 2017).

It was not possible to precisely determine the number of early marriages in Turkey because early marriages are unofficial marriages (re-

ligious marriage) and they are not registered (Boran et al., 2013, Özcebe and Biçer 2013). According to official records, the number of female child marriages in Turkey is 27637, which constitutes 4.6% of official registered marriages (TURKSTAT, 2016). High number of early marriages in their families negatively affect children and encourage them to marry (Mihçioğur et al., 2010). The ratio of the participants who had family members who married before the age of 18 was 14.6%. When their affinity was analyzed, 8.3% of them were mothers, 1.5% of them were second degree relatives, 4% of them were third degree relatives.

The scores of students for “Attitudes towards Female Child Marriage Scale” were at medium level (23 ± 11.129), this shows that they did not have a positive attitude towards female child marriages. In a study conducted in Pakistan where female marriages are common, it was found that a small of the university students (4.9% of female students, 17.2% of male students) have the opinion that female children can marry at an early age (Kamal et al. 2015). In a study conducted with nursing students in Turkey, 92.2% of the students stated that child marriage is a social problem (Aydin & Akay, 2017). When the related literature was evaluated, it was seen that university students have an awareness about female child marriages.

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CONCLUSION

It may be said that the scores of nursing students from “Attitudes towards Female Child Marriage Scale” were in the middle level and they generally have negative opinions on female child marriages. It is the responsibility of health professionals and the whole community to carry out social, economic and legal studies on the underlying causes (poverty, education level, traditional practices etc.), to raise public awareness, because female child marriages are still among the serious problems in our country. We esteem that a healthy, successful and happy society is dependent on women.

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