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FAMILY BELONGING AS A PREDICTOR OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

ROMANTİK İLİŞKİLERDE DOYUMUN YORDAYICISI OLARAK AİLE AİDİYETİ: ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİ ÖRNEĞİ

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Öz

Romantik ilişki doyumu, bireyin romantik ilişkisini ne ölçüde tatmin edici, güvenli ve anlamlı bulduğuna dair öznel değerlendirmesidir. Aile aidiyeti ise bireyin ailesi içinde kendini değerli, kabul edilmiş ve güvende hissetmesiyle ilgili psikososyal bir bağlılık duygusu olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, bireylerin aile aidiyeti düzeyleri ile romantik ilişki doyumları arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemek ve demografik değişkenlere göre anlamlı farklılıkları belirlemektir. Bu çalışma, ilişkisel tarama modeline dayalı nicel bir çalışma olarak tasarlanmıştır. Araştırmanın örneklemini yaşları 18 ile 30 arasında değişen ve en az altı aydır romantik ilişkisi bulunan 116 genç yetişkin oluşturmuştur. Katılımcılardan elde edilen veriler IBM SPSS 28.0 programı ile değerlendirilmiştir. Verilerin analizinde öncelikle betimsel istatistikler, korelasyon ve varyans analizleri uygulanmıştır. Grup karşılaştırmaları için bağımsız örneklem t-testi ve Welch t-testi kullanılmıştır Romantik ilişki doyumu ve aile aidiyeti arasında pozitif yönlü anlamlı korelasyona rastlanmıştır. Çekirdek aile yapısına sahip bireylerin romantik ilişki doyum düzeyleri, geniş aile yapısına sahip bireylere kıyasla daha yüksek korelasyon gösterdiği görülmüştür. Aile yapısına göre aile aidiyeti düzeyleri anlamlı biçimde farklılık gösterdiği görülmüştür. Cinsiyete göre yapılan analizlerde ise hem romantik ilişki doyumu hem de aile aidiyeti düzeylerinde anlamlı bir fark saptanmamıştır. Elde edilen bulgular, bireylerin romantik ilişki doyumlarının aile aidiyetiyle yakından ilişkili olduğunu ve bu durumun aile yapısından etkilenebileceğini göstermektedir. Bu sonuç ailede hissedilen aidiyetin, bireylerin romantik ilişkilerinde güven, bağlılık ve memnuniyet geliştirmelerinde önemli bir rol oynayabileceğine işaret etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelime: Aile Aidiyet, Romantik İlişki, Romantik İlişki Doyumu, Ebeveyn İlişkileri, Aile İlişkileri.

Abstract

Romantic relationship satisfaction (RRS) refers to how fulfilling, secure, and meaningful individuals perceive their romantic relationships. Family belonging (FB) is a psychosocial sense of attachment, reflecting the feeling of being valued, accepted, and safe within one's family. This study aims to investigate the relationship between romantic relationship satisfaction and family belonging and to assess differences based on demographic factors. Designed as a quantitative study using a correlational survey model, the sample consisted of 116 young adults aged 18–30 who had been in a romantic relationship for at least six months. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS 28.0. Descriptive statistics, correlation, and variance analyses were performed, along with independent samples t-test and Welch's t-test. Results showed a positive and significant relationship between romantic relationship satisfaction and family belonging. Participants from nuclear families reported significantly higher romantic relationship satisfaction than those from extended families. Similarly, family belonging also differed significantly by family structure. However, no significant differences were found in either variable according to gender. Overall, the findings highlight that stronger feelings of family belonging are associated with higher levels of romantic relationship satisfaction. These results suggest that early family experiences and perceived support within the family may play a critical role in shaping the quality of romantic relationships in young adulthood.

Keywords: Family Belonging, Romantic Relationship, Romantic Relationship Satisfaction, Parent Relationships, Family Relationships.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Romantik ilişki doyumu, bireylerin romantik ilişkilerine ilişkin tatminiyeti ile doğrudan ilişkili bir kavram olarak ilişkilerini ne derece tatmin edici, güvenli ve anlamlı bulduklarını değerlendirdikleri bir kavram olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Bu kavram, sevgi, bağlılık, güven, iletişim ve karşılıklı destek gibi birçok temel bileşeni içermektedir. Romantik ilişki doyumu, bireyin psikolojik iyi oluşu, benlik saygısı gibi psikosoyokültürel unsurlar ile doğrudan ilişkilidir. Romantik ilişki doyumundaki en önemli bileşenlerden birisi duygusal yakınlık olarak belirtilmektedir. Duygusal yakınlık, hem ilişkinin güvenli bağlanma zeminine oturmasını sağlamaktadır hem de bireylerin karşılıklı destek ve empati deneyimlerine olanak tanımaktadır. Öte yandan tutku ve bağlılığın da ilişkinin dinamikleri açısından hayati öneme sahip olduğu bildirilmektedir. Bağlı bireyler özellikle ilişki içerisinde ortaya çıkan sorunları çözme konusunda daha kararlı davranırlar ve uzun vadeli hedeflere daha fazla odaklanmaktadır. Tüm bu süreçler çok katmanlı bir yapı olan romantik ilişki doyumunu güçlendirmekte ve ilişkinin sağlıklı bir zeminde sürdürülmesine destek olmaktadır.

Aile aidiyeti ise bireyin içinde bulunduğu ailesinde kendini değerli, kabul edilmiş ve güvende hissetmesiyle ilişkilendirilmektedir. Söz konusu aidiyet duygusu, bireyin psikososyal gelişimi, bağlanma örüntüleri ve duygusal süreçleri üzerinde belirleyici bir etkiye sahiptir. Aile aidiyetini açıklamak amacıyla çeşitli kuramlar geliştirilmiştir. Bunlardan birisi bağlanma kuramıdır. Bağlanma kuramı, erken çocukluk döneminde bakım verenle kurulan ilişkinin bireyin tüm yaşamı boyunca ilişki kurma biçimini şekillendirdiğini ileri sürmektedir. Bağlanma kuramına göre güvenli bağlanan bireyler hem kendilerine hem de çevrelerindeki bireylere karşı olumlu tutum geliştirmektedir. Bu bireyler duygusal yakınlık kurma, bu yakınlığı sürdürme ve karşılıklı destek verme konularında dengelidirler. Kaygılı/kararsız bağlanan bireyler ise genellikle kendi değerlerine ilişkin belirsizlik yaşar ve bu nedenle romantik partnerlerine karşı aşırı bağlılık, kıskançlık ya da terk edilme korkusu gösterme eğilimindedir. Tüm bu paramterler romantic ilişki doyumunda aile aidiyetinin potansiyel rolüne ışık tutmaktadır.

Romantik ilişkilerde hissedilen ilişki doyumun ve bağlılığın sürdürülmesi yalnızca bireysel özelliklere değil aynı zamanda erken dönemde kazanılan aile içi bağlanma ve aidiyet deneyimlerine de dayanmaktadır. Bu nedenle aile aidiyetinin romantik ilişki doyumu üzerindeki etkisinin incelenmesi bireylerin duygusal ilişkilerindeki güven, bağlılık ve tatmin düzeylerini anlamak açısından önemli görülmektedir. Ayrıca ebeveynlerin halihazırdaki medeni durumu ve aile yapısı (çekirdek, geniş) gibi değişkenlerin bu ilişki üzerindeki yordayıcı etkilerini incelemenin aile sisteminin bireylerin ilişkisel yaşamlarına nasıl yansıdığını anlamada katkı sağlayacağı düşünülmektedir. Bu noktada söz konusu araştırmanın amacı genç yetişkinlerde aile aidiyeti ile romantik ilişki doyumu arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemek ve demografik değişkenler açısından anlamlı farklılıkları istatiksel yöntemler ile belirlemektir.

Çalışma ilişkisel tarama modeline dayalı nicel bir çalışma olarak tasarlanmıştır. Çalışmanın örneklemi 18–30 yaş aralığında 116 katılımcıdan oluşturmaktadır. Katılımcıların %68'i kadın, %32'si erkektir; yaş ortalaması 22.3 (SS = 2.4)'tür. Katılımcıların %34'ü aile yanında, %33'ü yurtta, %33'ü arkadaşlarıyla veya tek başına yaşamaktadır. Araştırmada veri toplama aracı olarak Aile Aidiyeti Ölçeği (AAS) ve Algılanan Romantik İlişki Kalitesi Ölçeği (ARİKÖ) kullanılmıştır. Ölçekler istatiksel açıdan yüksek iç tutarlılık katsayısına sahiptir. Veriler IBM SPSS 28.0 programı ile analiz edilmiştir. Veri analiz sürecinde ilk olarak betimsel istatistikler uygulanmış ardından değişkenler arası ilişkiyi incelemek için korelasyon analizi yapılmıştır. Gruplar arası farklılıkları belirlemek adına ANOVA analizi yapılmıştır. Ek olarak, varyansların homojen olmadığı koşullarda ise Games-Howell post-hoc testi istatiksel analiz gerçekleştirilmiştir. İki grup karşılaştırmalarında ise bağımsız örneklemler t-testi, varyans eşitliği sağlanmadığında Welch t-testi uygulanmıştır.

Bulgular, yapılan istatiksel analizler sonucunda aile aidiyeti ile romantik ilişki doyumu arasında anlamlı bir korelasyona rastlanmıştır. Ebeveyn durumu değişkenine göre aile aidiyeti düzeylerinde anlamlı fark saptanmıştır. Evli ebeveynlere sahip bireylerin boşanmış veya ayrı yaşayan ebeveynlere sahip bireylere kıyasla daha yüksek aidiyet düzeyine sahip oldukları bulunmuştur. Benzer biçimde evli ebeveynlere sahip katılımcıların romantik ilişki doyum düzeylerinin de katılıcımlar arasındaki diğer demografik ölçütlere sahip gruplara göre daha yüksek olduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Ayrıca aile yapısına göre yapılan analizlerde çekirdek aileden gelen bireylerin romantik ilişki doyumlarının geniş aileden gelenlere göre daha yüksek olduğuna ulaşılmıştır. Ancak cinsiyet değişkenine göre hem aile aidiyeti hem de romantik ilişki doyumunda anlamlı fark bulunmamıştır.

Elde edilen bulgular aile aidiyetinin bireylerin romantik ilişkilerindeki güven, bağlılık ve doyumun temel belirleyicilerinden biri olduğunu göstermiştir. Özellikle ebeveynlerin birlikteliğini sürdürebildiği, destekleyici aile ortamlarının, genç yetişkinlerin romantik ilişkilerinde daha yüksek doyum yaşamalarına katkı sağladığı anlaşılmaktadır. Bu sonuçlar romantik ilişkilerde yaşanan doyumun yalnızca bireysel değişkenlerle değil, aynı zamanda erken dönem aile dinamikleriyle de yakından ilişkili olduğunu işaret etmektedir.

INTRODUCTION

Romantic relationship satisfaction is defined as a subjective concept in which individuals evaluate how satisfying, secure, and meaningful they find their current romantic relationship (Joel et al., 2017). This concept includes multidimensional structures such as emotional intimacy, commitment, passion, communication quality, and trust (Fincham and Beach, 2010; Sternberg, 1986). An individual's early life and family relationships, especially the level of belonging to the family, play a decisive role in the quality of romantic relationships established in adulthood (Bowlby, 2008; Dinero et al., 2008). Family belonging is associated with an individual's feeling of being valued, accepted, and secure within the family (Mavili et al., 2014).

Although previous studies have examined romantic relationship satisfaction in relation to attachment styles, parental conflict, and relationship beliefs, the direct role of family belonging in predicting romantic relationship satisfaction among university students has received limited empirical attention, particularly in the Turkish context. Therefore, the present study aims to address this gap by examining the relationship between individuals' levels of family belonging and romantic relationship satisfaction. In addition, the study investigates whether these variables differ according to parental status and family structure. By focusing on family belonging as a predictor of romantic relationship satisfaction, the findings are expected to contribute to a more holistic understanding of young adults' romantic relationship dynamics and to provide useful implications for family-based psychoeducation and relational counseling practices.

Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant relationship between individuals' level of family belonging and romantic relationship satisfaction.

H2: Individuals' levels of family belonging differ significantly according to parental status.

H3: Individuals' romantic relationship satisfaction differs significantly according to parental status.

H4: Individuals' romantic relationship satisfaction differs significantly based on family structure (nuclear vs. extended).

1. FRAMEWORK

1.1. Romantic Relationship

First and foremost, romantic relationship satisfaction (RRS) is signified as a personal assessment of the overall quality of their relationship. This evaluation can cover many dimensions, such as love, support, security, intimacy, commitment, communication, and sexual satisfaction (Gerlach et al., 2020).

It is possible to come across many different definitions of RRS in the literature. Rubin (1973) explained RRS as general satisfaction resulting from the combination of love, care, and commitment to an individual's romantic partner. Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) saw RRS as directly related to the progress of the relationship through mutual satisfaction and exchange of love.

Fincham and Beach (2010) defined relationship satisfaction not only by mutual satisfaction but also by factors such as the capacity to cope with conflicts within the relationship and the frequency of positive interactions. Joel et al. (2017) defined romantic relationship satisfaction as a subjective measure of well-being based on the sum of an individual's continuous evaluations of their relationship (e.g., investment in the relationship, attraction to alternative partners, attachment style).

One of the fundamental components of romantic relationship satisfaction is emotional intimacy. This concept refers to the level at which individuals share their emotions with their partners and feel understood and accepted. Emotional intimacy not only establishes the relationship on a secure attachment basis but also allows individuals to experience mutual support and empathy (Vasquez et al., 2024).

Another important component of romantic relationships is commitment. For instance, in Rusbult's (1980) Investment Model, devotion is shaped by the level of satisfaction in the relationship, the attractiveness of the alternatives, and the sum of the investments made. Committed individuals are more dedicated to resolving issues that arise within the relationship and are more focused on long-term goals. Commitment, therefore, represents not only the determination to stay in the relationship, but also the individual's tendency to maintain the relationship with a positive effort.

On the one hand, the concept of passion is also of great importance in a romantic relationship. In romantic relationships, passion is defined as a strong motivational state that includes the desire to be with a partner, intense emotional intimacy, and sexual attraction (Beaudoin et al., 2021)

In the Triangular Theory of Love, passion represents the most dynamic and physiological aspect of love. According to this theory, while passion is usually at a crucial level in the initial stage of the relationship, this level may decrease over time. However, for a sustainable relationship, it is important to have a balanced existence with emotional intimacy and commitment. While the continuity of passion supports a sense of vitality and renewal in the relationship, the weakening of passion can cause relational monotony and lack of satisfaction. Thus, passion plays an essential role in determining both the initial motivational dimension of satisfaction and its long-term romantic vitality (Sternberg, 1986).

On the other hand, there is a growing consensus on the description of romantic passion, but not on the source of romantic passion (Carswell and Impett, 2021). Studies highlight that while passion associated with sexual satisfaction is an essential determinant of satisfaction in young adults, interpersonal intimacy is even more important, especially for women living with their partners (Józefacka et al., 2023).

It is known that individual factors are also very important in RRS. Personality traits, self-esteem, self-concept clarity, affective regulation skills, stress level, and mental health are important for RRS and maintaining a healthy relationship (Lee and Chang, 2021; Righetti et al., 2022). Therefore, the quality of interaction between couples includes dynamics such as communication patterns, conflict resolution styles, mutual trust, and mutual support, all of which play an essential role in maintaining healthy relationships (Kaya, 2018).

Nevertheless, structural characteristics such as family structure, socioeconomic level, and gender roles appear to constitute the environmental and societal context that influences individuals' romantic relationship satisfaction. For example, individuals growing up in nuclear families may have fewer social support resources because extended family support is more limited. This can make it difficult to cope with stress in romantic relationships. Furthermore, single-parent family structure or fragmented family history has been shown to influence secure attachment and relationship expectations in individuals (Mehr-un-Nisa Idrees et al., 2021).

Additionally, couples with lower income levels often face financial stress, resource scarcity, and external pressures more frequently. This can often increase communication problems and conflicts, reducing relationship satisfaction (Lucas et al. 2021, 2021).

Moreover, gender roles can directly influence relationship satisfaction by determining individuals' behavior patterns, expectations, and role distribution in romantic relationships (Arora and Chauhan, n.d.). Similarity or complementarity in partners' gender role attitudes can enhance relationship satisfaction. Studies have shown that both partners having egalitarian attitudes is associated with higher relationship satisfaction in women (Hudde, 2020; Jerves et al., 2022).

In the context of Türkiye, the dynamics of romantic relationships for young adults are shaped by individual characteristics, relational experiences, and societal norms. Yıldırım et al. (2021) found that among university students, RRS was mostly associated with the signifiance of the current relationship, the number of previous relationships, and the level of self-compassion, but relationship duration and status were not significant predictors. Şirin and Soyer (2018) revealed that individuals' attachment styles and current relationship status have a decisive effect on romantic belief patterns, especially emphasizing that beliefs such as "first and only" or "idealization" are associated with attachment anxiety and avoidance levels. Similarly, a study by İlhan (2021) stated that university students' irrational romantic beliefs are associated with romantic jealousy and that relationship problems are often caused by

unrealistic expectations. In a study conducted by Altınok and Hamamci (2017), a negative relationship was found between the perception of parental conflict and romantic relationship satisfaction among university students; it was also determined that problem-solving styles and irrational beliefs about relationships played a mediating role in this relationship.

Assessing romantic relationship satisfaction (RRS) is a topic that is frequently addressed in both psychological literature and clinical practice. Therefore, various measurement tools have been developed to evaluate the relational experiences of individuals more objectively. These scales are structured by considering the multidimensional nature of romantic relationships—such as emotional intimacy, commitment, communication quality, and conflict management. One of the most widely used tools internationally is the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), developed by Spanier (1976). This scale measures the harmony, satisfaction, and disagreement levels between couples. Another frequently used scale, the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), was developed by S. S. Hendrick (1988). This scale measures overall relationship satisfaction in a short and effective way.

When the local literature is examined, the Perceived Romantic Relationship Quality Scale (ARİKÖ), adapted to Turkish by Sağkal and Özdemir (2018), stands out. This scale covers relationship satisfaction, commitment, passion, trust, and love. In addition, the Satisfaction of Basic Psychological Needs in Romantic Relationships Scale is also among the scales frequently used in studies (Karaman and Arslan, 2023).

1.2. Family Belonging

Family belonging (FB) is often expressed as a concept with many sub-dimensions associated with feeling valuable, safe, loved, and accepted within the family structure to which the individual belongs (Mavili et al., 2014; Larsson et al., 2024). This concept is shaped not only by biological bonds but also by emotional closeness, communication quality, and mutual support between family members. FB plays a fundamental role in an individual's identity development, psychological resilience, and social attachment patterns (Mastrotheodoros et al., 2024; Erkan et al., 2023). In particular, the sense of belonging to the family that an individual develops during childhood and adolescence can affect the attachment styles in the relationships they establish in adulthood (Mavili, Kesen and Daşbaş, 2014).

FB is a basic need for the psychological and social health of the individual. Love, acceptance, support, and time spent together are decisive in forming this belonging. Strengthening the sense of belonging increases the quality of life and adaptation of individuals (Erkan et al., 2023; King et al., 2018). While strong family belonging increases the life satisfaction and psychological well-being of the individual, a lack of belonging has been associated with risks such as loneliness, low self-esteem, and attachment problems (Gök and Kocayörük, 2019; İlik and Kesen, 2019).

The sense of belonging is strengthened by processes that involve the individual's active participation, such as feeling valued, taking their opinions into account, and participating in family decisions (Bowlby, 2008; Leary and Baumeister, 2000). Especially in societies like Turkey, where collective cultures are dominant, family belonging encompasses not only individuals' bonds with their families but also their sense of responsibility and loyalty toward the family. Therefore, family belonging gains a holistic meaning when individuals feel that they are not only loved but also seen as part of a whole (Çağirkan, 2019; Mukba et al., 2023).

Leary and Baumeister (2000) define the "need to belong" as one of the basic psychological needs of human beings. They argue that failure to meet this need can lead to serious psychological problems in the individual. According to them, individuals have an intrinsic motivation to build meaningful and ongoing interpersonal relationships. This need can be met not only through social interaction but also through relationships that involve mutual acceptance, support, and emotional attachment.

The need to belong is associated with individuals feeling themselves as part of a social whole. Additionally, this is seen as an important motivator in close relationships, such as family and romantic relationships (Goodman et al., 2019).

The self-determination theory proposed by Deci and Ryan (2000) defines belonging as one of the basic psychological needs and states that meeting this need is decisive for an individual's well-being, motivation, and bonding capacity. If social ties cannot be established or maintained, consequences such

as loneliness, feelings of exclusion, low self-esteem, and depression may occur in the individual (Baumeister et al., 2002).

Family belonging is defined as a protective factor against negative consequences such as depression, behavioral problems, and risky behaviors in adolescents. Especially in individuals with high family functioning and a strong sense of belonging, self-esteem increases, and problematic behaviors decrease (Li et al., 2023; Rejaän et al., 2022). For instance, Rejaän et al. (2022) found that sense of belonging significantly predicted internal and external behavioral problems. Accordingly, adolescents with low levels of belonging were found to have a higher risk of these negative outcomes. Similarly, Li et al. (2023) reported that good family functioning was associated with higher self-esteem among adolescents with a strong need for belonging and may protect against problematic internet pornography use.

Punamäki et al. (2017) identified family types based on attachment, parental attitude, and sibling relationships, revealing that families with higher levels of family cohesion and warmth were associated with more secure attachment and stronger psychosocial adjustment in individuals. Roman et al. (2025) emphasized that variables such as family cohesion, emotional closeness, communication openness, and quality time spent together are the core dimensions that determine the "family cohesion" and reported consistent positive relationships between these variables and strong family relationships. The trust, support, and sense of belonging an individual experiences with their family can shape their attachment style, relationship expectations, and capacity for emotional intimacy in romantic relationships. For instance, it has been illustrated that the quality of the parent-child relationship is linked to representations of RRS and attachment in adulthood (Dinero et al., 2008).

Bowlby's attachment theory suggests that the relationship established with the caregiver in early childhood shapes the way an individual relates throughout his life. According to Bowlby (1969), attachment is an evolutionary tendency that develops based on the child's search for security, protection, and closeness. According to this theory, individuals carry the attachment styles they developed in childhood into their romantic relationships in adulthood (Hazan and Shaver, 2017).

Bowlby's attachment theory was adapted in the context of adult romantic relationships, and three basic attachment styles were defined to explain the behavior of individuals in relationships: secure, anxious/ambivalent, and avoidant. These attachment styles reveal how the attachment experiences individuals develop in childhood are reflected in their relationships in adulthood. Securely attached individuals develop positive attitudes towards both themselves and others. For example, they balance establishing and maintaining emotional intimacy and providing mutual support. Individuals with anxious or else ambivalent attachment often experience uncertainty about their own worth and therefore tend to show excessive attachment, jealousy, or fear of abandonment towards their romantic partners. Emotional fluctuations in these individuals can reduce the level of quality in relationships. Individuals with avoidant attachment, over and above that, tend to avoid emotional intimacy, overly glorifying independence. They have difficulty trusting others and tend to distance themselves in relationships (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991).

Attachment styles significantly influence not only individuals' behavior patterns in relationships but also many relational variables such as RRS, relationship quality, commitment level, and conflict resolution strategies (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2010). It has been determined that the level of mutual satisfaction and commitment in the relationships of securely attached individuals is higher, and their communication and problem-solving skills are more developed. In contrast, anxiously attached individuals are more likely to experience unbalanced expectations, dependency, jealousy, and intense emotional demands. Avoidantly attached individuals, however, tend to show emotional distance, low commitment, and a tendency to deny relationship problems (Collins, 1996). In addition, the effect of attachment styles on relationship satisfaction is shaped not only by the individual's own attachment styles but also by the interaction with their partner's attachment style (Kirkpatrick and Davis, 1994). For example, it can be difficult to maintain a balance between a secure individual and an anxious or avoidant partner.

Individuals who feel loved, accepted, and supported within the family tend to internalize these positive experiences and develop more secure attachment styles in adulthood (Feeney and Noller, 1990).

Therefore, individuals with high family belongings are likelier to establish emotional intimacy, develop trust, and experience relationship satisfaction in romantic relationships (Karreman and Vingerhoets, 2012). The feeling of belonging within the family increases the individual's self-esteem, supports emotion regulation skills, and allows them to establish healthy boundaries in romantic relationships. From this perspective, family belonging affects not only an individual's relationship with their family but also the quality and sustainability of their romantic relationships in adulthood.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative correlational survey design to examine the relationship between family belonging and romantic relationship satisfaction among university students.

2.2. Participants

The participants of this study consisted of young adults aged between 18 and 30 who were currently involved in a romantic relationship and studying at various universities in Türkiye. A convenience sampling method was employed, as participants were recruited on a voluntary basis from the accessible population. To be included in the study, participants were required to have been in a romantic relationship for at least six months. This criterion was determined to ensure that participants had sufficient relational experience to evaluate their romantic relationship satisfaction and perceived FB.

Participants were recruited from different universities across Türkiye, including both public and foundation universities. Although the study did not aim to obtain a nationally representative sample, collecting data from students enrolled in different institutional contexts helped increase the diversity of the sample and improved the generalizability of the findings.

The legal age of majority (≥18) was taken as the lower limit for participation in the study, and it was decided to exclude individuals over the age of 30 due to developmental stage differences. A power analysis was performed using G*Power 3.1 software before the study. Accordingly, a minimum of 112 participants was considered sufficient for the study to be carried out in a healthy way with a moderate effect size (f = .25), 95% confidence level, and 80% test power. However, to prevent possible data loss, the targeted sample size has been increased above this number. Data from a total of 116 participants were included.

2.3. Tools

A general information form developed by the researcher was used to collect demographic data, including age, sex, parental status (married, divorced, separated, deceased), family structure (nucleus, extended), and relationship duration.

Perceived Romantic Relationship Quality Scale (ARİKÖ): In this study, ARİKÖ was used to evaluate the quality of romantic relationships. The scale consists of 6 items and a single factor and is based on a five-point Likert-type response. Cronbach's Alpha value was found to be .86, construct reliability was .87, and test-retest reliability was .81. These results show that ARİKÖ is a short, valid, and reliable measurement tool (Sağkal and Özdemir, 2018).

Family Belonging Scale (AAS): In this study, the AAS was used to determine the level of belonging of individuals towards their families. The scale is a five-point Likert-type measurement tool consisting of 17 items and two factors (family belonging and self-belonging). It was developed on 1579 university students studying at different universities in Konya; the KMO value was found to be .96, and the Bartlett test was found to be significant ($\chi^2 = 16943.88$, $p < .001$). It was reported that the scale explained 60% of the total variance, and the internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) was .94. These findings indicate that AAS is a valid and reliable measurement tool (Mavili et al., 2014).

Finally, the internal consistency coefficients of the scales used in this study were examined; Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$ was found for the Family Belonging Scale and Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$ for the Romantic Relationship Quality Scale. These values indicate that both scales have a high level of internal consistency in the research sample.

2.4. Statistical Analysis

The data obtained were analyzed using SPSS 28.0 program. Descriptive statistics including basic trend and dispersion measures were included in the data analysis process. In this context, the arithmetic means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values of the variables were calculated. The results of the descriptive analysis formed the basis for the comparative and relationship analyses made in the later stages. Pearson correlation analysis was performed to determine the level of relationship between the variables.

Secondly, before proceeding to correlation analysis, the necessary assumptions were tested. The scatter plot examining the relationship between variables was reviewed, and the distribution was found to be linear. Outliers were checked using box plots and Z-scores; no significant outliers were found outside the ±3 limit. The normality of the variables was assessed using skewness and kurtosis coefficients, and both measurements were found to be within acceptable ranges. Additionally, the homogeneity of variances was examined using the Levene test, and the assumption was found to be met. Accordingly, it was deemed appropriate to use the Pearson correlation coefficient.

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to test the effects of categorical variables such as parental status and family structure on family belonging (AAS) and romantic relationship satisfaction (ARİKÖ). However, because of Levene's Test, it was determined that the variances between the groups were not homogeneous. Therefore, the Games-Howell test, which does not assume the homogeneity of variances, was preferred in post-hoc analyses. This test is important in that it provides reliable results in case of different group sizes and heterogeneous variances.

An independent samples t-test was used to examine differences in RRS in terms of independent variables with two categories, such as family structure (nuclear vs. extended family). The Levene test was also performed for this analysis, and since the variances were found to be inhomogeneous, the Welch t-test was applied instead of the standard t-test. The Welch test produces more reliable results in terms of minimizing the risk of error in unequal group variances. In addition, the t-test was similarly applied in comparisons by gender.

2.5. Ethics Committee Permission

Ethical approval for this research was obtained from the Yıldız Technical University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (23.06.2025; No: 2025.06).

3. FINDINGS

A total of 116 university students participated in the study. Participants consisted of 68.1% women (n = 79) and 31.9% men (n = 37). Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 30, with an average age of 22.3 (SD = 2.74). Of the participants, 34.5% lived with their families, 32.8% lived in student dormitories, and 32.7% lived alone or with friends. In terms of educational level, 58.6% of the participants were undergraduate students, 27.6% were associate degree students, and 13.8% were graduate students.

Table 1 Correlation Between Family Belonging and Romantic Relationship Quality

Variables	**Family Belonging**	**Romantic Relationship Quality**
Family Belonging	1	.752**
Romantic Relationship Quality	.752**	1

Note. N = 116. ** *p* < .01.

A significant and positive relationship was found between FB and romantic relationship quality (r = .752, p < .001). This finding suggests that individuals with higher levels of FB also have higher perceptions of satisfaction and quality in their romantic relationships.

Table 2 Comparison of Family Belonging Levels by Parental Status

Compared Groups	Mean Difference	Std. Error	*p*
MP – DP	19.39	4.86	.002
MP – SP	25.91	2.93	.001
SP – MP	-25.91	2.93	.001
SP – OD	17.09	3.54	.001
SP – BD	20.61	4.26	.005

Note. N = 116. All *p* values are < .01.
Note 2. Note 2. MP = Married parents, DP = Divorced parents, SP = Married but separated parents, OD = One parent deceased, BD = Both parents deceased.

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) performed to determine differences between parental status and level of FB revealed a statistically significant difference between the groups, F (4, 111) = 8.84, p <.001. The Levene test result showed that the variances were not homogeneous, p < .001; therefore, the Games-Howell test was used in post-hoc analyses.

Post-hoc analyses showed that individuals with married parents had significantly higher family belonging levels than those with divorced parents (p = .002) and those whose parents were married but living apart (p < .001). Furthermore, individuals whose parents were married but living apart had lower family belonging levels than those with one deceased parent (p = .001) and those with both parents deceased (p = .005).

Table 3 Differences in Romantic Relationship Satisfaction by Parental Status

Compared Groups	Mean Difference	Std. Error	p
MP – DP	7.31	1.75	.001
MP – SP	11.43	1.89	.001
MP – OD	8.32	1.38	.001
MP – BD	12.05	1.60	.001
SP – BD	-6.62	1.71	.037
BD – DP	4.74	1.56	.035

Note. N = 116. Significance values represent two-tailed *p* values.
Note 2. MP = Note 2. MP = Married parents, DP = Divorced parents, SP = Married but separated parents, OD = One parent deceased, BD = Both parents deceased.

The results of one-way analysis of variance showed that the parental status variable had a significant effect on RRS, F (4, 111) = 14.071, p < .001. Since the results of the Levene test revealed that the variances were not homogeneous, the Games-Howell post-hoc test was applied to determine the group differences.

As a result of post-hoc analyses, it was found that the RRS levels of individuals with "Married" parents were significantly higher than those with "Divorced" (p = .001), "Married but living apart" (p < .001), "One deceased" (p < .001) and "Both deceased" (p < .001) parents. In addition, individuals with "married but separated" parents had significantly lower romantic satisfaction compared to individuals with "both deceased" parents (p = .037). However, it was also observed that individuals in the "Both deceased" group had higher romantic satisfaction compared to individuals with "Divorced" parents (p =.035).

Table 4 Welch t-Test Results of Romantic Relationship Satisfaction Scores According to Family Structure

t	df	*p*	Mean Difference
5.75	107.174	.001	6.402

Note. N = 116. Welch's *t*-test was used due to unequal variances.

Levene's test for homogeneity of variances was applied to evaluate whether the variances between the groups were equal. According to the results, a significant difference was found between the variances ($F = 36.80$, $p < .001$), so the assumption that the variances were not equal was adopted, and the results of the Welch t-test were taken as a basis. According to the results of the Welch t-test, RRS scores differed significantly according to family structure, $t(107.17) = 5.76$, $p < .001$. The mean difference is 6.40; this shows that individuals who grow up in nuclear families experience higher satisfaction in romantic relationships.

As a result of the independent sample t-test, it was found that there was no significant difference in the levels of FB according to gender ($t(114) = 1.12$, $p = .263$). This finding shows that the perceptions of FB of male and female participants were at a similar level.

According to the results of the t-test of independent samples, there was no significant difference in RRS scores according to the gender variable ($t(114) = 0.97$, $p = .334$). This finding shows that the perceptions of RRS of male and female participants are quite similar and that gender is not a determining factor on RRS.

Table 5 Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Family Belonging	0.306	0.025	.752	12.171	< .001

Note. Dependent variable: Romantic Relationship Satisfaction.

$R^2 = .565$, $F(1,114) = 148.13$, $p < .001$.

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether family belonging predicts romantic relationship satisfaction. The results indicated that family belonging significantly predicted romantic relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .752$, $t = 12.17$, $p < .001$). The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1,114) = 148.13$, $p < .001$, and explained 56.5% of the variance in romantic relationship satisfaction ($R^2 = .565$). These findings suggest that higher levels of perceived family belonging are associated with higher levels of romantic relationship satisfaction.

4. DISCUSSION

When the findings of our study are examined, it is seen that individuals with a high level of FB also have higher perceptions of satisfaction and quality in their romantic relationships (Table 1). This finding is interpreted as a parallel result with Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory. As a matter of fact, when evaluated within the framework of attachment theory, it is argued that secure family bonds established in childhood play a critical role in determining the quality of romantic relationships established by an individual in later life. Therefore, feeling loved, valued, and safe in the family increases the capacity of the individual to establish emotional intimacy, develop trust, and experience satisfaction in romantic relationships (Feeney and Noller, 1990; Karreman and Vingerhoets, 2012).

Similarly, Leary and Baumeister's (2000) concept of "the need to belong" is reflected in this finding (Table 1). It is known that in family structures where the sense of belonging is met, individuals establish more secure bonds in social relations and have higher self-esteem. This can increase both satisfaction and the perception of quality in romantic relationships. Dinero et al. (2008) revealed that RRS is directly related to the quality of the relationship an individual establishes with their parents during childhood. In other words, strong FB supports the development of secure attachment patterns in the individual, which increases RRS.

In addition, the correlation findings shown in Table 1 in our study were found to be consistent with the studies conducted by Mastrotheodoros et al. (2024) and Erkan et al. (2023). In these studies, it

is emphasized that individuals with high family members have higher levels of psychological well-being and higher levels of trust, intimacy, and satisfaction in their interpersonal relationships (Erkan et al., 2023; Mastrotheodoros et al., 2024). This suggests that FB is not only related to domestic functioning but is also a significant factor that shapes an individual's overall experience in romantic relationships.

The ANOVA and Games-Howell post-hoc tests, which examine the effect of parental status on family belonging, showed that individuals with "married" parents felt significantly higher FB compared to other groups. Notably, individuals with "married but separated" parents had lower levels of belonging compared to "married," "one deceased," and "two deceased" parent groups. This finding reveals that family conflicts and emotional disconnections can damage the sense of belonging in the individual (Table 2). It has also been reported in the literature that parental coexistence supports the psychological trust environment in the family and increases the sense of belonging (Krauss et al., 2020; Otrar and Demirbilek, 2013). In separated parents, it is observed that this structure weakens, and individuals move away from the family (Ogan et al., 2024). Studies show that children with separated parents are significantly affected (Atmaca and Kiliç, 2024; Uğraş, 2024). This situation also affects the quality of future romantic relationships and RRS. Moreover, Cohen and Koren (2025) note that even divorce in old age affects adult children's romantic relationships.

Additionally, considering the literature, it is thought that the higher level of belonging despite the loss of a parent is because post-mortem idealization processes or clear roles create less conflict in the individual (van Heijningen et al., 2025). In addition, this finding may also be interpreted within the sociocultural context of Türkiye. In collectivist cultures, extended family members and kinship networks often provide emotional and social support when a parental loss occurs. Such supportive family environments may partially compensate for the absence of a parent and help maintain a sense of belonging within the family system. Furthermore, the relatively small subgroup sizes in the present sample may have influenced the observed differences. Therefore, these findings should be interpreted with caution, and future studies with larger and more balanced samples are needed to further examine this pattern. (Table 2).

As a result of one-way analysis of variance, the differences between parental status and RRS were statistically significant, indicating that family structure may be a determining factor in the romantic relationships of young adults (Table 3). The findings revealed that individuals with "married" parents had significantly higher RRS compared to all other groups. This suggests that a stable coexistence within the family contributes positively to an individual's capacity for trust, commitment, and maintaining the relationship. Similar findings are found in international literature. For instance, Rhoades et al. (2012) found that individuals whose parents were married and conflict-free reported higher satisfaction, commitment, and trust in their romantic relationships. Similarly, it is possible to come across different studies that emphasize that parental separation negatively affects the trust and commitment levels of young adults in their romantic relationships (Cui and Fincham, 2010; Jacquet and Surra, 2001). In contrast, some studies suggest that irreversible circumstances, such as the loss of a parent, do not have as strong an impact as separation or divorce (Fabella, 2022). The findings of this study are also consistent with this literature because it has been observed that individuals with "married but separated" parents have lower RRS than those who have experienced parental loss. This suggests that relational disconnects can damage young adults' perception of belonging and trust more than natural losses such as death. It also suggests that sociocultural and socioeconomic differences also affect this process.

In our study, it was found that the levels of RRS differed significantly according to family structure. Welch t-test results revealed that individuals raised in nuclear families experienced higher satisfaction in their romantic relationships. This finding aligns with the literature that the basic relationship dynamics within an individual's family environment play an important role in the formation of feelings of trust, attachment, and satisfaction in romantic relationships (Dinero et al., 2008; Kurşuncu and Sümer, 2023).

The regression findings further support the role of family belonging as a significant predictor of romantic relationship satisfaction, indicating that individuals who perceive stronger familial bonds tend to report higher levels of satisfaction in their romantic relationships.

It is known that the nuclear family structure generally provides an environment with fewer

conflicts, more stability, and more pronounced boundaries between individuals (Nes et al., 2010), which allows individuals to develop emotional regulation skills and internalize their sense of relational trust. Such developmental gains can directly affect the level of satisfaction and commitment in the bond that an individual establishes with their romantic partner in later life. This was consistent with individuals growing up in nuclear families experiencing higher romantic satisfaction in the current study.

However, findings regarding parental loss groups should be interpreted with methodological caution, as subgroup sizes may be relatively small and the cross-sectional design does not allow causal inference. Future studies with larger and more balanced subgroup distributions are needed to confirm these patterns.

One notable constraint is the gender imbalance within the participant group, as the majority of the sample consisted of female respondents. This may limit the generalizability of the findings across broader populations. In addition, the use of self-report measures might have introduced bias due to social desirability or subjective interpretations. Future studies could aim for more balanced gender distributions and consider employing mixed methods or behavioral assessments to validate self-reported data. From an applied perspective, the findings underscore the need for psychoeducational interventions and digital literacy programs targeted at young adults in romantic relationships to mitigate the potential negative impacts of excessive social media use on relational well-being.

Etik Beyan: *Bu çalışmada kullanılan anket yöntemi için Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu'ndan 23.06.2025 tarihli ve 2025.06 sayılı etik onay alınmıştır. Aksi bir durumun tespiti halinde Beykent Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisinin hiçbir sorumluluğu olmayıp, tüm sorumluluk çalışmanın yazarlarına aittir.*
Yazar Katkı Beyanı: *1. yazarın katkı oranı %30, 2. yazarın katkı oranı ise %40, 3. Yazarın katkı oranı %30'dur.*
Çıkar Beyanı: *Yazarlar arasında çıkar çatışması yoktur.*

Ethics Statement: *Ethical approval for the survey method used in this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee for Social and Humanities Research at Yıldız Technical University, dated 23 June 2025 and numbered 2025.06. Should any contrary circumstances be identified, the Beykent University Journal of Social Sciences shall bear no responsibility; all responsibility lies with the authors of the study.*
Author Contributions Statement: *1st author's contribution rate 30 %, 2nd author's contribution rate 40 %, 3rd author's contribution rate 30%.*
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