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Turkish Adaptation of the MATRRESS: A Multidimensional Scale of Manipulation Tactics in Romantic Relationships

Romantik İlişkilerde Manipülasyon: MATRRESS Ölçeğinin Türkçe Uyarlama Çalışması

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Abstract

This study aimed to adapt the Multidimensional Scale of Manipulation Tactics in Romantic Relationships (MATRRESS) into Turkish and to evaluate its psychometric properties within the socio-cultural context of Türkiye. Data were collected online from 290 participants (206 women, 84 men; Mage = 27.05, SD = 9.90). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses supported the original 8-factor structure of the MATRRESS. The exploratory factor analysis accounted for 67.46% of the total variance, and the confirmatory factor analysis indicated an excellent fit to the data (CFI = .996, TLI = .996, RMSEA = .044, 90% CI [.037, .050], SRMR = .090). Reliability analyses indicated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .88 for the overall scale and values ranging from .70 to .89 for the subdimensions. Correlational analyses demonstrated significant associations between manipulation tactics, Dark Triad traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy), and emotional manipulation. Gender differences emerged, with men scoring higher in overall emotional manipulation and Dark Triad traits, while women reported greater use of Abandonment Threats. The Turkish version of the MATRRESS offers a valid and reliable tool for future research, supporting cross-cultural comparisons and the development of targeted interventions.

Keywords: Emotional Manipulation, MATRRESS, Scale Adaptation, Dark Triad Traits, Romantic Relationships.

Öz

Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, Romantik İlişkilerde Manipülasyon Taktikleri Çok Boyutlu Ölçeği'nin (MATRRESS) Türkçe'ye uyarlanması ve Türkiye'nin sosyo-kültürel bağlamında psikometrik özelliklerinin değerlendirilmesidir. Araştırma kapsamında veriler çevrimiçi anket yoluyla 290 katılımcıdan toplanmıştır. Katılımcıların 206'sı kadın, 84'ü erkektir ve yaş ortalaması 27,05 (SS = 9,90) olarak bulunmuştur. Yapılan açımlayıcı ve doğrulayıcı faktör analizleri, ölçeğin özgün 8 faktörlü yapısını desteklemiştir. Açımlayıcı faktör analizi toplam varyansın %67,46'sını açıklarken, doğrulayıcı faktör analizi de modelin veriye mükemmel uyum gösterdiğini ortaya koymuştur (CFI = .996, TLI = .996, RMSEA = .044, %90 GA [.037, .050], SRMR = .090). Güvenirlik analizleri sonucunda ölçeğin bütününe ilişkin Cronbach alfa katsayısı .88 olarak tespit edilmiş, alt boyutlarda ise bu değerlerin .70 ile .89 arasında değiştiği görülmüştür. Korelasyon analizleri, manipülasyon taktikleri ile Karanlık Üçlü özellikleri (Makyavelcilik, narsisizm ve psikopati) ve duygusal manipülasyon arasında anlamlı ilişkiler olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca cinsiyet farklılıkları da gözlenmiştir: Erkekler, genel duygusal manipülasyon düzeylerinde ve Karanlık Üçlü özelliklerinde daha yüksek puan alırken, kadınların terk tehdidi taktiklerini daha sık kullandıkları bulunmuştur. Sonuç olarak, MATRRESS'in Türkçe versiyonu hem geçerli hem de güvenilir bir ölçüm aracı sunmakta, kültürler arası karşılaştırmalara katkı sağlamakta ve ilişkilerde manipülasyon davranışlarını hedef alan müdahalelerin geliştirilmesine olanak tanımaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Duygusal Manipülasyon, MATRRESS, Ölçek Uyarlaması, Karanlık Üçlü Özellikleri, Romantik İlişkiler.

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Turkish Adaptation of the MATRRESS: A Multidimensional Scale of Manipulation Tactics in Romantic Relationships

Romantic relationships are emotional attachments formed through mutual understanding and communication (Sternberg, 1986). These relationships, including marriage, dating, and long-term partnerships, involve continuous interactions between willing participants (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006). Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love identifies passion, intimacy, and commitment as the core dynamics of romantic relationships (Sternberg, 1986). When these dynamics are balanced, romantic relationships contribute positively to self-esteem (Larson, 1988), strengthen self-perception (Larson & Richards, 1991), facilitate social and emotional adjustment (Carlson & Rose, 2007), and provide a vital source of social support (Connolly & Konarski, 1994). As a result, such relationships are strongly linked to well-being (Assad & Donnellan, 2007; Myers, 2000; Reis et al., 2000). However, the same relationships can become sources of interpersonal conflict, negative self-perception, and mood disorders when unhealthy dynamics emerge (Montgomery & Sorell, 1997; Roisman et al., 2005). Beyond relationship satisfaction, romantic relationships also involve ongoing interpersonal influence processes in which partners negotiate autonomy, closeness, and relational power. When these influence processes become imbalanced, covert strategies such as emotional manipulation may emerge as a means of regulating the relationship and maintaining control.

Attachment theory further highlights the developmental significance of romantic relationships, emphasizing their role in shaping interpersonal functioning throughout life (Bowlby, 1980). Erikson (1994) similarly views the ability to form romantic bonds as a marker of healthy personality development. These theoretical perspectives underscore the importance of understanding both the positive and negative aspects of romantic relationships, particularly dynamics that contribute to psychological harm, such as emotional manipulation. In this sense, emotional manipulation can be understood as a relational strategy that disrupts healthy attachment-related functioning by undermining trust, autonomy, and emotional security.

Building on an interpersonal influence perspective, emotional manipulation can be viewed as a strategic set of tactics through which partners attempt to shape each other’s emotions, decisions, and behaviors. Within this framework, Dark Triad traits are considered key dispositional antecedents that may increase the likelihood of employing such tactics in ways that undermine relational trust and autonomy. Emotional manipulation, defined as the covert and often exploitative influence of one individual over another, is a phenomenon frequently encountered in romantic relationships (Chapaux-Morelli & Couderc, 2017). Manipulation tactics are employed to control or direct a partner's behavior without their awareness, often for the manipulator's personal gain (Braiker, 2004). Harmful manipulation is characterized by concealed intentions and the infliction of emotional harm (Clempner, 2017). Such behaviors undermine the manipulated individual's autonomy, making it difficult for them to use their intelligence, willpower, and emotions freely (McGinn, 2014). Because manipulation is often subtle and embedded in everyday interactions, it may be normalized or overlooked by partners, particularly in long-term relationships. This highlights the need to conceptualize manipulation not as a single behavior, but as a set of tactics that operate through different psychological mechanisms. Recent meta-analytic evidence indicates that manipulativeness is consistently associated with lower relational quality across different operationalizations, including both Machiavellianism and emotional manipulation (Turner, 2026). Importantly, this association appears robust across age, gender, relationship type, and measurement approach.

The prevalence and impact of emotional manipulation are amplified by its strong association with the Dark Triad personality traits: Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy (Austin et al., 2007;

Jonason et al., 2010; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). These traits, collectively referred to as the Dark Triad, are characterized by malevolent intentions, emotional detachment, and a manipulative interpersonal style. While these traits are not always clinically diagnosable, individuals exhibiting them often create significant social and relational challenges (De Clercq et al., 2018; Furnham et al., 2013). From a theoretical standpoint, Dark Triad traits may increase the likelihood of using emotional manipulation by fostering an instrumental view of romantic relationships and prioritizing self-interest over mutuality. Therefore, examining emotional manipulation together with Dark Triad traits provides a clearer framework for understanding harmful relational dynamics. Complementing this theoretical linkage, recent empirical work finds that individuals scoring higher on Dark Triad traits are more likely to engage in manipulation-linked behaviors and lower relationship satisfaction, underscoring the role of these traits in everyday romantic dynamics (Geng, 2025). Recent research further suggests that attachment-related tendencies may shape how Dark Triad traits translate into interpersonal conflict and relationally harmful strategies, highlighting that personality dispositions operate within broader relational dynamics rather than in isolation (Ives, 2025).

To study emotional manipulation in romantic relationships more systematically, researchers have developed specific measurement tools, such as the Manipulation Tactics in Romantic Relationships Scale (MATRRESS). The MATRRESS scale is designed to evaluate the extent and types of manipulative behaviors employed by individuals within romantic relationships. It includes various dimensions of manipulation tactics, such as inducing guilt, threatening abandonment, undermining self-esteem, and distorting a partner's perception (Ioannidis, 2021). This scale has been used to better understand the psychological mechanisms underlying emotional manipulation and its effects on relationship dynamics. Importantly, distinguishing between different manipulation tactics allows researchers to identify which strategies are more prevalent, socially tolerated, or psychologically damaging in specific relational and cultural contexts.

Despite its potential for advancing research in this area, the MATRRESS scale has not yet been adapted for use in the Turkish-speaking population in Türkiye. Given the cultural and linguistic differences that influence romantic relationships and the manifestation of manipulative behaviors, adapting this scale into Turkish is crucial for ensuring its validity and reliability in Türkiye. In Türkiye, romantic relationships are often embedded within broader family and social networks, and relational expectations may place stronger emphasis on interdependence, loyalty, and relational harmony. Cultural psychology research indicates that interdependent self-construal—characterized by relational closeness, mutual obligation, and heightened sensitivity to relational expectations—is more prevalent in collectivistic contexts such as Türkiye, whereas individualistic settings prioritize autonomy and self-expression (Hofstede, 2001; Sakman & Sümer, 2024). Empirical evidence from Turkish samples further suggests that close relationship processes may not always be captured in an equivalent manner by instruments developed in Western individualistic contexts, as cultural differences can influence both construct representation and item interpretation (Çakır, 2020; Özgülük Üçok et al., 2024). In such a cultural setting, behaviors such as withdrawal of social contact, indirect emotional influence, or normative pressure may carry meanings distinct from those observed in more individualistic cultures, potentially affecting both perceived intent and psychological function of manipulation tactics. Therefore, beyond linguistic translation, adapting MATRRESS to the Turkish cultural context is necessary to ensure that the items retain their intended psychological meaning and that the scale measures manipulation tactics in a conceptually equivalent way. Such an adaptation would provide a psychometrically sound instrument for examining emotional manipulation in romantic relationships in Türkiye and will facilitate both cross-cultural research and applied work in clinical and counseling settings.

The aim of the present study is to adapt the MATRRESS scale into Turkish and evaluate its psychometric properties, including validity, reliability, and factor structure, within the context of Turkish culture. By doing so, this study seeks to provide a robust tool for examining emotional manipulation in romantic relationships in Türkiye, paving the way for future research and interventions in this area.

Method

Participants

Data were collected from a total of 310 participants. However, 20 participants were excluded from the analysis due to incorrect responses to attention questions, resulting in a final sample size of 290 participants. Of these, 206 identified as women and 84 as men. The mean age of the participants was 27.05 years (SD = 9.90). Socioeconomic status (SES) was assessed using a single-item ladder scale. Participants were asked to place themselves on a 10-rung ladder representing their perceived socioeconomic status in Turkey, with higher rungs indicating higher socioeconomic status. The mean SES score was 6.44 (SD = 1.49). The sample size was determined based on commonly used recommendations for factor analytic studies. Given that the MATRRESS includes 32 Likert-type items and an eight-factor structure, we aimed to obtain a sample size that would allow stable parameter estimation in CFA. The final sample (N = 290) exceeds frequently cited minimum recommendations (e.g., $N \geq 200$) for CFA models of moderate complexity.

Regarding education level, participants reported the following highest degrees attained: 38.3% high school, 47.2% undergraduate degree, 6.6% master's degree, and 7.9% doctoral degree. Additionally, participants were asked about their relationship status, with 30% reporting no current relationship and 70% indicating they were in a relationship, which included being married, engaged, or in other forms of romantic involvement.

Procedure

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from [BLINDED]. Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling technique, leveraging announcements on various social media platforms and other online channels. Data collection was conducted via online surveys administered using Google Forms. Prior to participation, all participants were provided with detailed information about the study objectives and procedures. Informed consent was obtained electronically through anonymous surveys, and participation was entirely voluntary. No personally identifiable information was collected from participants to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Measures

Multidimensional Scale of Manipulation Tactics in Romantic Relationships (MATRRESS)

The scale, developed by Ioannidis and 18 mental health experts (2021), originally consisted of 45 items. However, 13 items were excluded during the original validation study by Ioannidis (2021) due to poor psychometric performance (e.g., low factor loadings), resulting in a final 32-item version. The present study utilized this validated 32-item version for the Turkish adaptation process, which maintains8 sub-dimensions: Abandonment Threats, Induction to Guilt, Self-Harm Threats, Induction to Jealousy, Coercive Distance/Silent Treatment, Dividing and Conquering, Deflation of Self-Esteem, Charm and Sweet-talking.

Prior to data collection, the scale was translated into Turkish using a standard translation and back-translation procedure to ensure linguistic and conceptual equivalence. First, two bilingual translators (both native Turkish speakers with graduate-level training in psychology) independently translated the

original English items into Turkish. The two forward translations were then compared and reconciled by the research team to produce a single preliminary Turkish version, with attention to semantic accuracy and cultural appropriateness. Next, the preliminary Turkish version was back-translated into English by an independent bilingual translator who was blind to the original scale wording. The back-translated items were compared with the original items, and minor revisions were made until conceptual equivalence was achieved across versions.

Content validity was assessed through expert review. Specifically, a panel of three reviewers with training in psychology evaluated the translated items for clarity, coherence, and fidelity to the original meaning. Reviewers were provided with a brief explanation of the study objectives but were otherwise uninformed about the research questions. Based on their feedback, minor wording revisions were made to improve comprehensibility and cultural appropriateness. The final version of the scale was then reviewed and approved by the research advisor. No cognitive interviews or pilot testing were conducted prior to the main data collection.

Participants were provided with the following explanation: "In our romantic relationships, we frequently use tactics to influence and control our partners. These tactics can be used to gain our partners' love, interest, to manage them, earn their respect, assess how much they care, prevent them from leaving us, and for many other reasons". Participants were instructed to assess the extent to which they had utilized each tactic in their past or current romantic relationships using a four-point Likert scale ranging from "Not at all" to "To a great extent." The details about validity and reliability will be given in the results section.

Emotional Manipulation Scale

The Emotional Manipulation Scale is a scale developed by Austin et al. (2007), aiming to measure the tendency for emotional manipulation in others. The Turkish adaptation of the study was conducted by Aydemir (2021). The scale has a one-factor structure and consists of 10 items ($\alpha = 0.89$). An example item is "I can use my emotional skills to make people feel guilty."

Dark Triad Scale

The scale developed by Jonason and Webster (2010) is used to measure personality traits known as the dark triad, which includes Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism. The Turkish adaptation was carried out by Yaşlıoğlu and Atılgan (2018). The scale has a three-factor structure, with a total of 12 items, each comprising 4 items. An example item for Machiavellianism ($\alpha = 0.83$) is "I can compliment people to get what I want"; for narcissism ($\alpha = 0.76$), "I can want others to admire me"; and for psychopathy ($\alpha = 0.85$), "I tend not to feel guilty about things I've done."

Results

Validity of Multidimensional Scale of Manipulation Tactics in Romantic Relationships

Factor Structure: An exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the 32-item MATRRESS. The suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy, which yielded a value of .82, indicating a good fit for factor analysis. Additionally, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant, $\chi 2(496) = 4977.39$, $p < .001$, supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix. Using the Kaiser's criterion of eigenvalues greater than 1, the analysis revealed an 8-factor model, consistent with the original scale. This model accounted for 67.46% of the total variance, with communalities exceeding .47 for all items. The majority of items aligned with the original 8-factor structure. However, one item "DC1. I isolated my partner from others"—loaded onto the "Deflation of Self-Esteem" factor in the Turkish version, whereas in the

original scale, it belongs to the “Dividing and Conquering” factor. After careful consideration, we chose to retain DC1 in its original factor (Dividing and Conquering) for the following reasons: (1) Theoretically, the item aligns more closely with the concept of Dividing and Conquering, as it reflects behaviors aimed at isolating a partner to exert control—an idea central to this factor. Moving this item to the Deflation of Self-Esteem factor could dilute the conceptual clarity of both constructs, as this factor primarily captures behaviors targeting the partner's self-worth rather than relational dynamics like isolation. (2) Reliability analysis further supports retaining the item in its original factor. When DC1 is included in the Dividing and Conquering factor, the reliability improves to .67, compared to .61 when it is excluded. In contrast, adding DC1 to the Deflation of Self-Esteem factor reduces its reliability from .85 to .83, indicating that the original configuration provides better internal consistency. Thus, placing the item in its original factor preserves better overall reliability for the Turkish adaptation.

These results serve as an indicator of construct validity for the Multidimensional Scale of Manipulation Tactics in Romantic Relationships (MATRRESS). A summary of scale items, factor loadings, eigenvalues, explained variances, item-total correlations, and internal reliabilities can be found in Table 1.

Reliability of Multidimensional Scale of Manipulation Tactics in Romantic Relationships

Internal consistency of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The overall Cronbach's alpha for the scale was found to be .88, indicating very good internal consistency, as it exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of .70 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Furthermore, the internal consistency of each factor within the scale was examined. The Cronbach's alpha values for each factor were as follows: the first factor had an alpha of .81, the second factor had .80, the third factor had .84, the fourth factor had .81, the fifth factor had .78, the sixth factor had .70, the seventh factor had .89, and the eighth factor had .85 (see Table 1). These results indicate sufficient internal consistency for each factor within the scale.

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the eight-factor structure of the Turkish version of the MATRRESS. Given that the items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale, the model was estimated using the WLSMV estimator. The CFA results indicated an excellent fit to the data, $\chi^2(436) = 758.82$, $p < .001$, CFI = .996, TLI = .996, RMSEA = .044, 90% CI [.037, .050], and SRMR = .090. Standardized factor loadings were statistically significant and ranged from .51 to .93, supporting the adequacy of the proposed measurement model. Overall, these findings provide further evidence for the construct validity of the Turkish MATRRESS and support the retention of the original eight-factor structure.

Correlation Analysis

Table 2 presents the zero-order correlations between the study variables. The results revealed significant correlations among various variables. Emotional manipulation was found to be positively correlated with Deflation of Self-Esteem (DE), Charm and Sweet-talking (CH), Abandonment Threats (AT), Induction to Jealousy (IJ), Induction to Guilt (IG), Coercive Distance/Silent Treatment (CDST), and Dividing and Conquering (DC). Additionally, narcissism and Machiavellianism showed positive correlations with DE, CH, AT, IJ, IG, CDST, and DC. Moreover, psychopathy was positively correlated with CH, AT, IJ, IG, and DC.

Table 1

Factor Loadings, Item-Total Correlations, Explained Variances, Eigenvalues, and Cronbach Alphas

Factor / Item	Factor Loadings	Item-Total Correlations
Factor 1: Abandonment Threats (AT)		
AT1. I threatened to leave him/her.	.811	.68
AT2. I told my partner that I will abandon him/her.	.796	.68
AT3. I showed signs that a break-up is imminent.	.722	.60
AT4. I told him to break up, even if I didn't really mean it.	.721	.56
(*Explained variance* = 6.87%; *Eigenvalue* = 2.20; α = .80)		
Factor 2: Induction to Guilt (IG)		
IG1. I appeared more vulnerable.	.695	.49
IG2. I pretended that I am not feeling very well.	.806	.68
IG3. I played the victim.	.765	.73
IG4. I faked crying.	.643	.55
(*Explained variance* = 4.27%; *Eigenvalue* = 1.37; α = .79)		
Factor 3: Self-Harm Threats (SH)		
SH1. I implied that I would hurt myself.	.858	.75
SH2. I appeared suicidal.	.814	.66
SH3. I threatened that I would end my life.	.854	.74
SH4. I displayed self-destructive behaviors.	.684	.52
(*Explained variance* = 8.34%; *Eigenvalue* = 2.67; α = .82)		
Factor 4: Induction to Jealousy (IJ)		
IJ1. I told my partner that other people are into me.	.817	.76
IJ2. I told my partner that others find me attractive.	.827	.78
IJ3. I compared him/her with other romantic candidates.	.626	.43
IJ4. I made him/her feel jealous.	.591	.61
(*Explained variance* = 6.34%; *Eigenvalue* = 2.03; α = .82)		
Factor 5: Coercive Distance/Silent Treatment (CDST)		
CDST1. I appeared indifferent to him/her.	.696	.59
CDST2. I ignored him/her.	.721	.63
CDST3. I used silent treatment.	.771	.58
CDST4. I distanced myself.	.657	.55
(*Explained variance* = 3.88%; *Eigenvalue* = 1.24; α = .78)		

Table 1 (continued)

Factor / Item	Factor Loadings	Item-Total Correlations
Factor 6: Dividing and Conquering (DC)		
DC1. I isolated my partner from others.	.515	.45
DC2. I encouraged my partner to clash with others.	.739	.68
DC3. I urged my partner to mistrust others.	.743	.43
DC4. I told him no one else really cares about him/her.	.507	.44
(*Explained variance* = 3.32%; *Eigenvalue* = 1.06; α = .67)		
Factor 7: Charm and Sweet-talking (CH)		
CH1. I used sweet-talking.	.888	.78
CH2. I used compliments.	.934	.87
CH3. I used flattery.	.928	.85
CH4. I used my charm over him/her.	.628	.55
(*Explained variance* = 12.01%; *Eigenvalue* = 3.84; α = .89)		
Factor 8: Deflation of Self-Esteem (DE)		
DE1. I lowered my partner's self-esteem.	.844	.72
DE2. I made my partner feel useless.	.826	.74
DE3. I made my partner feel inferior.	.779	.74
DE4. I didn't let my partner feel too good about himself/herself.	.671	.58
(*Explained variance* = 22.43%; *Eigenvalue* = 7.18; α = .85)		

Gender Differences

Gender differences in emotional manipulation, MATRRESS factor scores, and Dark Triad traits were examined using Welch's independent samples t-tests, which are robust to unequal group sizes and do not assume homogeneity of variances. Results indicated that men (M = 2.97, SD = 1.01) reported significantly higher overall emotional manipulation than women (M = 2.63, SD = 0.92, p = .003). Regarding *MATRRESS factors*, women (M = 1.82, SD = 0.77) scored significantly higher in Abandonment Threats (AT) compared to men (M = 1.64, SD = 0.64, p = .031. Conversely, men *(*M = 1.44, SD = 0.49) scored significantly higher in Dividing and Conquering (DC) compared to women (M = 1.22, SD = 0.44, p < .001). *Dark Triad traits:* Men (M = 2.46, SD = 1.09) scored significantly higher in narcissism compared to women (M = 1.77, SD = 1.01, p < .001). Additionally, men (M = 2.82, SD = 1.11) scored significantly higher in Machiavellianism compared to women (M = 2.33, SD = 1.01, p < .001). All gender comparisons should be interpreted as exploratory, as measurement invariance across gender was not tested.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.Abandonment Threats (AT)	1.77	.74	-										
2. Induction to Guilt (IG)	1.72	.73	.26**	-									
3. Self-Harm Threats (SH)	1.15	.40	.25**	.26**	-								
4. Induction to Jealousy (IJ)	1.66	.71	.26**	.53**	.17**	-							
5. Coercive Distance/Silent Treatment (CDST)	1.83	.70	.38**	.23**	.07	.35**	-						
6. Dividing and Conquering (DC)	1.28	.47	.20**	.32**	.21**	.33**	.37**	-					
7. Charm and Sweet-talking (CH)	3.04	.86	.11	.28**	.07	.30**	-.08	.12**	-				
8. Deflation of Self-Esteem (DE)	1.19	.46	.31**	.20**	.12**	.18**	.44**	.52**	.01	-			
9. MATRRESS Mean			.12*	.20**	-.03	.35**	.20**	.31**	.34**	.18**	-		
10. Narcissism	1.97	.98	.12*	.26**	.04	.37**	.23**	.43**	.32**	.21**	.54**	-	
11. Machiavellianism	2.47	1.07	.15*	.43**	.07	.45**	.19**	.39**	.35**	.20**	.61**	.63**	-
12. Psychopathy	3.53	1.03	.14*	.28**	.02	.30**	.09	.17**	.37**	.06	.43**	.27**	.52**

*p < .05. **p < .01

Discussion

This study provides a Turkish adaptation of the MATRRESS and evidence for its psychometric adequacy in a Turkish sample. The findings indicate that the scale is a reliable and valid tool for assessing emotional manipulation tactics in romantic relationships within a Turkish cultural context. Conceptually, emotional manipulation can be viewed as a set of interpersonal influence tactics through which individuals attempt to regulate closeness, autonomy, and relational power in romantic relationships. In this sense, MATRRESS provides a multidimensional framework for distinguishing between qualitatively different influence strategies rather than treating manipulation as a single, undifferentiated behavior.

Theoretical and Methodological Contributions

The successful retention of the original 8-factor structure of the MATRRESS in its Turkish adaptation underscores the universality of manipulation tactics in romantic relationships. This consistency aligns with previous findings (Ioannidis, 2021) and reinforces the idea that emotional manipulation is a cross-cultural phenomenon with shared underlying dimensions. However, one notable deviation was observed: the item "DC1. I isolated my partner from others" initially loaded onto the "Deflation of Self-Esteem" factor instead of its original "Dividing and Conquering" factor.

After careful consideration, we chose to retain DC1 within its original factor. This decision was guided by both theoretical and empirical considerations. Theoretically, DC1 aligns more closely with behaviors associated with relational control, which are central to the "Dividing and Conquering" construct. Empirically, retaining DC1 in its original factor yielded higher reliability scores, ensuring the psychometric robustness of the Turkish adaptation.

Gender Differences and Relational Dynamics

The observed gender differences in emotional manipulation and Dark Triad traits provide important insights into how gender roles and personality traits intersect to shape relational dynamics. Our findings reveal that men scored higher in overall emotional manipulation and Dark Triad traits, particularly narcissism and Machiavellianism. These findings align with research conducted across diverse cultural contexts (e.g., Jonason et al., 2010; Ioannidis, 2021) suggesting that men may adopt more overtly manipulative behaviors as tools for asserting control and dominance in romantic relationships. Recent

research also suggests that Dark Triad traits are associated with agentic, dominance-oriented interpersonal strategies, which may translate into higher use of coercive or control-based tactics in intimate relationships (Lyons, 2019; Pilch & Smolorz, 2019). In this sense, men's higher scores on manipulation and Dark Triad traits may reflect gendered socialization patterns that reward assertiveness and relational control strategies more strongly for men than for women in many cultural contexts. Machiavellianism, characterized by a strategic, self-serving mindset, may encourage men to employ manipulation tactics such as charm or deception to achieve relational goals without consideration for their partner's autonomy. Similarly, narcissistic tendencies—marked by a desire for admiration and superiority—might drive men to use manipulation as a means of reinforcing their perceived status within the relationship.

Importantly, gendered relational strategies are also shaped by culturally embedded expectations regarding loyalty, jealousy, and acceptable forms of interpersonal influence. In many relational contexts, jealousy-related monitoring, restricting contact, and interference with a partner's social environment can operate as everyday expressions of relational control, and their perceived legitimacy may vary by gender. Evidence from Turkish samples indicates that psychologically controlling behaviors in dating relationships such as restricting contact, isolating the partner, inducing guilt, and issuing threats are commonly reported forms of psychological violence (Keçeci & Ümmet, 2025). In addition, research on intimate partner violence and coercive control highlights that control tactics often appear as gradual relational processes (e.g., monitoring, limiting autonomy, and social restriction) rather than isolated acts, and these processes are strongly shaped by gendered power dynamics (Stark, 2007). Taken together, higher male scores on emotional manipulation and Dark Triad traits may reflect not only dispositional tendencies but also culturally patterned relational practices that normalize certain control-related tactics as part of relationship management.

Conversely, women scored higher in tactics such as Abandonment Threats, a finding that may reflect relational strategies shaped by cultural and gendered socialization processes. In many societies, including Türkiye, traditional gender roles emphasize emotional attachment and dependency for women, often tying their sense of self-worth to the stability and security of romantic relationships (Eagly & Wood, 2012). This socialization may foster the use of tactics like Abandonment Threats, which signal distress or dissatisfaction while simultaneously testing the partner's commitment and willingness to stay in the relationship. Such tactics may operate as commitment-relevant signals, particularly in contexts where relational continuity is socially emphasized, and indirect influence is more acceptable than overt control.

However, these gender-related findings should be interpreted with caution. In the present study, gender differences were examined using independent samples t-tests and are reported as exploratory results. Because measurement invariance across gender was not tested, it cannot be concluded that the MATRRESS factors operate identically across women and men in this sample. Future research should replicate these findings and formally evaluate measurement invariance before drawing strong conclusions regarding gender-based mean differences.

Cultural Implications

Cultural context plays a central role in shaping how emotional manipulation tactics are interpreted, labeled, and reported, particularly in close romantic relationships where family involvement and relational interdependence are salient (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Sakman & Sümer, 2024). Accordingly, beyond linguistic translation, scale adaptation requires attention to conceptual equivalence, as the same behavioral tactic may serve different relational functions across cultural contexts. In the present adaptation, the overall replication of the original eight-factor structure suggests that the core manipulation tactics assessed by the MATRRESS are broadly recognizable and comparable

in the Turkish context. At the same time, item-level deviations provide an important reminder that certain tactics may carry culturally shaped meanings and therefore may not always map onto the same psychological processes in an identical manner.

The divergent factor-loading pattern observed for DC1 ("I isolated my partner from others") may reflect culturally specific meanings attached to "isolation" in Türkiye. In many Turkish relational settings, partners' social worlds are often intertwined with family networks and close-knit friendship circles, and relational expectations may emphasize loyalty, togetherness, and prioritizing the relationship over external ties (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007; Triandis, 1995). Within such a context, behaviors that restrict or discourage contact with others may not always be perceived primarily as strategic relational control; instead, they may be interpreted as undermining a partner's confidence, independence, and sense of self, thereby aligning more closely with self-esteem deflation processes. From this perspective, "isolation" may be understood less as an explicit dominance strategy and more as a gradual interpersonal dynamic through which autonomy is reduced and psychological dependence is reinforced. For instance, discouraging a partner from meeting friends, questioning the partner's social interactions, or framing external relationships as threatening may function as a subtle form of emotional erosion rather than an overt attempt to control. Such interpretations may be further reinforced in cultural environments where relational boundaries can be more permeable and where romantic relationships may be evaluated not only by the couple but also by broader social and familial expectations.

Importantly, this culturally grounded interpretation may also extend to other manipulation tactics assessed in the MATRRESS. For example, tactics involving guilt induction or indirect emotional pressure may be more easily framed as relational obligation or normative accountability in interdependent contexts, potentially shaping how individuals label and report these behaviors. Similarly, strategies such as abandonment threats may operate differently in contexts where relationship continuity and commitment are strongly valued and where separation may carry higher relational and social costs. These considerations suggest that the cultural environment may influence not only the prevalence of certain tactics but also their perceived intent, acceptability, and psychological impact.

Therefore, the DC1 discrepancy highlights that certain manipulation tactics may carry culturally embedded meanings that shift their psychological function and perceived intent. While retaining DC1 in its original factor preserved theoretical consistency with the original scale structure, this finding underscores the importance of culturally sensitive adaptation and suggests that future research should examine whether similar patterns emerge in other contexts characterized by strong relational interdependence and family-centered social norms (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). Future studies may also benefit from using qualitative methods or cognitive interviewing approaches to further clarify how individuals in Türkiye interpret manipulation-related behaviors, particularly those involving social boundaries, relational obligations, and indirect influence processes.

Practical Applications

The Turkish adaptation of the MATRRESS scale provides a valuable tool for both researchers and practitioners. Clinicians and counselors can use the scale to assess manipulation tactics in romantic relationships, offering insights that can guide interventions to foster healthier relational dynamics. For researchers, the scale enables exploration of the antecedents and consequences of emotional manipulation, including its interplay with personality traits, attachment styles, and cultural factors.

Meta-analytic findings further suggest that manipulativeness is reliably linked to poorer relational quality, regardless of whether it is conceptualized as a personality disposition (e.g., Machiavellianism) or as behavioral emotional manipulation (Turner, 2026). This pattern highlights the importance of addressing both dispositional risk factors and relationship interaction processes in applied settings.

Limitations and Future Directions

While this study offers contributions, it is not without limitations. The snowball sampling method may have introduced selection bias, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings. Specifically, the sample may lack diversity in terms of education level, socioeconomic status, and geographic representation, as participants were primarily recruited through social networks. Future research should aim to replicate these results using more representative and demographically diverse sampling methods to ensure the findings can be generalized to the broader Turkish population. Future studies could also examine how emotional manipulation evolves over time and across different stages of romantic relationships. Finally, gender-based comparisons should be regarded as preliminary because measurement invariance across gender was not evaluated. Future research should examine measurement invariance across gender and replicate these findings across more balanced and diverse participant groups.

Conclusion

This study adapted the MATRRESS scale into Turkish, confirming its validity and reliability as a tool for assessing manipulation tactics in romantic relationships. The findings highlight the universality of emotional manipulation while emphasizing the need for cultural sensitivity during scale adaptation. By providing an instrument for the Turkish-speaking population in Türkiye, this research lays the groundwork for future studies exploring the relationship between manipulation, personality, and culture in romantic relationships.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Approval

The study was approved by the TOBB University of Economics and Technology, Human Research Evaluation Board (No. 29.08.2023 / 2023-36).

Informed Consent

All participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study and provided written informed consent prior to participation.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to all stages of this study, including the conception of the research idea, the scale adaptation process, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of the findings, and preparation of the manuscript. All authors critically reviewed the final version of the manuscript and approved it for publication.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The corresponding author declares that there are no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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