

# Sexism Attitudes and Life Satisfaction in University Students

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study was performed as a descriptive to determine sexism attitudes and evaluation life satisfaction among university students in a State University. **Methods:** The study was conducted between the dates 05 May-10 June 2016. Population of the study was consisted all of students who are registered to State University in Vocational School of Health Services, Ankara, Turkey (N=413). The sample of research was determined as 200 students who agreed to research and accessible. During the data collection period, Personal Information Form, Ambivalent Sexism Scale (ASS) and Life Satisfaction Scale (LSS) were used. The collected data was analyzed with using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test for independent samples and one way analysis of variance tests. **Results:** The gender of students participating in the study were female by 86.9% and their mean age was 48.2±10.3. While ASS point average was 79.63±17.13 in female students and point average of male students was 97.65±14.80. According to this results, male students have sexism attitude more than female students. In addition, point average of hostile sexism of male students (47.58±8.06) were higher, while point average of benevolent sexism in the female students (48.29±8.52) were more higher. LSS point average of students was 20.63±0.07. In the study, it was determined that students who close to graduation, whose economical status perceptions were good, father's attitudes towards yourself were democratical and future expectations were realized, life satisfaction were higher (p<0.05). In addition to that, there was no significant relation between sex of students, mother's attitudes towards yourself, sexism attitude and life satisfaction (p>0.05). **Conclusion:** According to result of study, it is determined that socio demographic characteristics effects on life satisfaction and male students adopt hostile sexism while female students adopt to benevolent sexism.

**Key words:** Ambivalent sexism, life satisfaction, university students

## INTRODUCTION

Sex is typically defined as the genetic, physiological and biological characteristics of a person as male or female. Gender is a social and cultural construction that contains norms, roles, and relationships of groups of women and men. On the other hand, gender comprises a person's identities, expressions, and societal behaviors. This definition refers to how a person states themselves to others and how they want the society to see them or distribution of

power, credit, training, and more ephemeral resources (1-4). Many cultures have different systems of norms and beliefs, which lead to the creation of gender patterns. Learning gender roles starts from birth that may reveal their status as boy, man, girl or women. The focus of the sexism is generally the negative beliefs and practices especially towards women such as discrimination based on the sex of persons (2,5). According to the ambivalent sexism theory, sexist attitudes include a stereotyped view of women that include two types of sexism; 1) hostile and 2) benevolent. Hostile sexism focus

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on experiences such as sexual harassment, assault, and other hostile acts of gender discrimination. Specifically, benevolent sexism reflects a belief that women are weak and in need of protection. Ambivalent sexism is a perspective offering that there are some positive attitudes and towards women beside the negative attitudes and behaviors. These actions are actually damaging to people and gender equality more broadly, which is generally associated with the need to be protected women by men (5-10). Previous studies highlight the way that gender stereotypes, gender-based inequalities, and stigmas influence a person's life satisfaction and mental health including depression, anxiety, decreased self-esteem, and somatic symptoms (4,6,8-12).

### Aim

This study was planned to reveal the ambivalent sexism thinking levels and life satisfaction of students.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

### Study type, population, sample and setting

This descriptive and cross-sectional study was conducted between May and June 2016 at a State University in Ankara, Turkey. The population was composed of the women who recruited to Nursing Department of State University (N=413). The 200 students who could be reached and volunteered were included in the final sample.

### Eligibility criteria and ethical consideration

Eligibility criteria for patients were: (a) 18 years or older, (b) can read and write in Turkish, (c) agree to participate in the research. For this study, ethics approval was obtained from the Research and Ethics Board of University. Rules specified in The Helsinki Declaration were observed in the data collection phase.

### Instruments

In the collection of data; 1) Questionnaire Form (QF), 2) Ambivalent Sexism Scale (ASS), and 3) Life Satisfaction Scale (LSS) were used (5,13).

**The QF:** This form was developed by researchers. There were a total of 10 questions in the form related to socio-demographic characteristics of students. Interviews were held with the participants by means of face-to-face interviews. The interviews were approximately 20 min each.

**The ASS:** It is a 22 –item scale on a 6 points Likert style, which was developed by Glick and Fiske (1996) to evaluate ambivalently sexist attitudes. This scale is composed of two subscales; the hostile sexism (11 items) and the benevolent sexism scale (11 items). The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 22, and the highest score is 132. High scores obtained from the scale indicate that hostile sexism

and protective sexism are high (5). The Turkish validity and reliability study of the scale (Cronbach alpha; 0.82) was carried out by Sakallı (2002), (14).

**The LSS:** This scale was developed by Deiner, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) to determine life satisfaction (13). The Turkish validity and reliability study of the scale (Cronbach alpha; 0.86) was carried out by Yetim (1993) (15). The scale is a self-assessment scale consisting of 5 Likert type items ranging from “1 = not at all appropriate to 7 = completely appropriate”. The lowest score that can be obtained from this scale is 5, and the highest score is 35. The higher the score obtained from the scale, the higher the life satisfaction.

### Data Analysis

The analyses were undertaken in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences 21.0 (SPSS) package software. Data were evaluated using number, percentage, mean and standard deviation, One way variance analysis, Independent t test, and Tukey test. The significance level was  $p < 0.05$ .

## RESULTS

The mean age of the student was  $20.38 \pm 1.37$  (min:17, max:24). In the study, it was determined that 79.5% of the students were female, 37.0% of them were in first grade, 98.5% of them were single, and 90.5% of them had medium academic achievement. It was determined that 76.5% of the students thought that some of their expectations for the future were realized, 56.0% of them evaluated their mother's attitude towards them as democratic, and similarly, 59.0% of them evaluated their father's attitude towards them as democratic (Table 1).

The mean ASS score of the students was  $83.33 \pm 18.17$  (min=31, max=125). When the distribution of the ASS subscale mean scores was analyzed, the mean of hostile sexism was  $39.63 \pm 9.61$ , and the mean of benevolent sexism was  $44.28 \pm 10.46$ . While protective sexism was higher than the thought of hostile sexism, the difference between them turned out to be very close (Table 2).

It was determined that the total mean score of ASS of the students participating in the study, and the mean scores of hostile sexism and benevolent sexism, which are sub-dimensions of ASS, differed statistically significantly according to gender ( $p < 0.05$ ). While the mean score of hostile sexism is  $37.57 \pm 8.90$  for female students, it is  $47.58 \pm 8.06$  for male students. In addition, while the mean score of benevolent sexism is  $48.29 \pm 8.52$  for female students, it is  $43.24 \pm 10.68$  for male students. In addition, the mean ASS score was  $79.63 \pm 17.13$  for female students, and this average was found to be  $97.65 \pm 14.80$  for male students (Table 3).

The mean score of the students in the LSS was  $20.63 \pm 0.07$  (min=5, max=34). It was determined that there was a statistically significant difference between the students participating in the study, their perception of the economic situation, their academic success, the realization of their future expectations, their fathers' attitudes towards themselves and their LSS score averages ( $p < 0.05$ ). While the mean score of LSS for first-year students was  $20.24 \pm 5.83$ , it was found to be  $24.50 \pm 5.35$  for fourth-year students. While the mean score of LSS is  $26.00 \pm 6.08$  for students with a good perception of economic situation, it is  $16.33 \pm 6.24$  for students with a bad perception of economic situation. The mean score of LSS for those with high academic achievement was  $21.13 \pm 6.13$ ,  $17.22 \pm 6.20$  for those with low academic achievement.

When their expectations for the future life are evaluated, the average score of the students who think that all of their expectations have come true is  $23.85 \pm 5.97$ , and this average is determined as  $9.66 \pm 4.08$  for those who think that none of their expectations have come true. While the LSS score average of the students who evaluated their father's attitude towards him as democratic was  $22.15 \pm 5.67$ , the LSS average score of the students who thought that their father's attitude towards him was irrelevant was  $16.42 \pm 6.03$ . In addition, in our study, it was determined that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of LSS according to the gender of the students and their mothers' attitudes towards them ( $p > 0.05$ ) (Table 4). In addition, there was no statistically significant relationship between the students' ASS score average and their LSS score average ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 1.** Distribution of Students' Basic Characteristics (n=200)

Characteristics	N	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	159	79.5
Male	41	20.5
<b>Grade</b>		
1	74	37.0
2	46	23.0
3	58	29.0
4	22	11.0
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	3	1.5
Single	197	98.5
<b>Economic status</b>		
Good	7	3.5
Medium	181	90.5
Poor	12	6.0
<b>Academic achievement</b>		
High	29	14.5
Medium	153	76.5
Low	18	9.0
<b>Future expectation</b>		
All	41	20.5
Some	153	76.5
None	6	3.0
<b>Mother's attitude</b>		
Authoritarian	39	19.5
Democratic	112	56.0
Over protective	45	22.5
Irrelevant	4	2.0
<b>Father's attitude</b>		
Authoritarian	33	16.5
Democratic	118	59.0
Over protective	35	17.5
Irrelevant	14	7.0

**Table 2:** Distribution of Students' ASS and Subscale Mean Scores (n=200)

ASS sub-scales	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Hostile sexism	13	63	39.63	9.61
Benevolent sexism	16	66	44.28	10.46
<b>Total</b>	31	125	83.33	18.17

**Table 3:** Distribution of ASS/Subscale Scores According to the Gender of the Students (n=200)

ASS sub-scales	Gender	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Analysis*
Hostile sexism	Female	159	13	63	37.57	8.90	t=6.536
	Male	41	27	61	47.58	8.06	<b>p&lt;0.001</b>
Benevolent sexism	Female	159	16	66	48.29	8.52	t=2.802
	Male	41	29	63	43.24	10.68	<b>p=0.006</b>
<b>Total</b>	Female	159	31	125	79.63	17.13	t=6.166
	Male	41	63	121	97.65	14.80	<b>p&lt;0.001</b>

\* Independent t test

**Table 4:** Distribution of LSS Scores According to the Characteristics of the Students (n=200)

Characteristics	Mean±SD	Min	Max	Analysis*
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	20.64 ±5.82	5	34	t*=0.059
Male	20.58±7.02	5	33	<b>p=0.953</b>
<b>Grade</b>				
1	18.91±5.64	9	34	F**=4.632 <b>p=0.004</b>
2	20.24±5.83	5	34	
3	21.03±6.39	9	33	
4	24.50±5.35	12	33	
<b>Economic status</b>				
Good	26.00±6.08	14	33	F**=6.051 <b>p=0.003</b>
Medium	20.71±5.89	5	34	
Poor	16.33±6.24	8	30	
<b>Academic achievement</b>				
High	21.13±6.13	5	31	F**=3.207 <b>p=0.043</b>
Medium	20.94±5.95	5	34	
Low	17.22±6.20	9	30	
<b>Future expectation</b>				
All	23.85±5.97	9	34	F**=18.788 <b>p&lt;0.001</b>
Some	20.20±5.53	8	34	
None	9.66±4.08	5	15	
<b>Mother's attitude</b>				
Democratic	21.21±5.95	9	33	F**=1.302 p=0.275
Authoritarian	19.89±5.55	8	34	
Over protective	20.22±6.57	5	34	
Irrelevant	16.25±7.63	5	22	
<b>Father's attitude</b>				
Democratic	22.15±5.67	9	27	F**=8.270 <b>p&lt;0.001</b>
Authoritarian	22.15±5.67	8	34	
Over protective	20.00±6.22	5	34	
Irrelevant	16.42±6.03	5	27	

\*One-way variance analysis and Independent t test

## DISCUSSION

In our study, the mean age of the students was  $20.38 \pm 1.37$ , and the majority (79.5%) were females. The mean ASS score was  $79.63 \pm 17.13$  for female students, and this average was  $97.65 \pm 14.80$  for male students ( $p < 0.05$ ). According to this result, it can be said that male students have a higher sexist attitude tendency than female students. In the study of Mızrak and Özerdoğan (2014), the mean ASS score was reported as 58.30 for male students and 57.78 for female students (16). In Alptekin's (2014) study, it is emphasized that males have higher sexism attitude scores than females (17).

In this study, it was determined that male students had higher scores on hostile sexism and female students on benevolent sexism subscales ( $p < 0.05$ ). Most previous research has focused on men being hostile and protective approach towards women. Studies carried out support our finding, revealing that female adopt a more protective sexist attitude, while men adopt a more hostile sexist attitude (18-26). This indicates the effectiveness of patriarchal elements that are dominant in social life. In order to achieve gender equality, equality of opportunity between the sexes is important, but not only men but also women need to get rid of the patriarchal effects on them (17).

In our study, the mean score of the students' LSS was determined as  $20.63 \pm 0.07$ . Similarly, Deniz et al (2012) also reported the mean LSS score of university students in our country as  $23.77 \pm 5.7$  (19). When life satisfaction is analyzed by gender, some studies show that female students have higher life satisfaction than male students (19,27,28), while some studies report that there is no significant difference between gender and life satisfaction (29,30). In our study, there was no statistically significant difference between the gender of the students and the mean score of the LSS ( $p > 0.05$ ). In the literature, it is stated that one of the strongest variables of life satisfaction is socio-economic status. When the studies are examined, it is noteworthy that students with a good perception of economic situation have higher life satisfaction than those with a poor perception of economic situation (19,23,30,31). According to the results of this research, there is a significant relationship between life satisfaction and perception of economic situation ( $p < 0.05$ ).

In our study, the life satisfaction levels of the students differ according to the grade they are studying in, their academic success, the realization of their future expectations and their fathers' attitudes towards them ( $p < 0.05$ ). It was determined that life satisfaction of the students increased as graduation approached ( $p < 0.05$ ). However, in the study of Kanat and Dikkaya (2014), it was stated that there was no significant difference between the grades and life satisfaction of

university students receiving art education (32). Academic score, which is effective in reaching the profession that will determine the status of the individual in society, is one of the most important factors in the happiness of university students (33). Studies also support this view and reveal that as the level of academic achievement increases, life satisfaction increases (28,31,33). Considering our study finding of a similar nature, it is thought that it is important to support university students' participation in academic and social activities where they can meet their achievement needs by demonstrating their own competencies.

Achieving the goals of students with high academic success in this field means realizing their future expectations. Therefore, students whose expectations are met have higher life satisfaction (33). In our study, the life expectancy of the students whose expectations were all realized was higher than those whose expectations were not fulfilled ( $p < 0.05$ ), which is an expected result. It is known that there is a relationship between the parental attitude perceived by the student groups and their life satisfaction (27-29). When the studies are examined, it is seen that the life satisfaction of university students, especially in the adolescent period, increases with their parents' democratic attitudes towards them (30,32). According to our study results, there was a significant relationship between life satisfaction and perceived father attitude, but no significant relationship was found between perceived mother' attitude ( $p < 0.05$ ). It is thought that this situation is related to the dominance of the patriarchal family structure and sexism attitudes in our society. Since democratic parental attitudes enable individuals to feel unconditionally accepted, act more freely in their choices, develop a healthy self, and increase their self-confidence, they positively affect the life satisfaction levels of university students (13,19).

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

As a result, in our study, it was determined that male students had a higher level of sexist attitude than females, the hostile sexism approach was adopted more by male students, and the protective sexism approach was adopted more by female students. This situation reveals the importance of including training on sexism and gender in the university education curriculum. With these trainings, students are expected to be role models for other groups in the society by increasing their awareness and consciousness levels. In addition, students who are in the last year, have high economic status and academic success, have fulfilled expectations for the future, and whose fathers have a democratic attitude have higher life satisfaction.

In this context, it can be suggested that the university allocates more budget to scholarships in order to increase the academic

success of the students, to provide guidance services to the students and to increase the financial support opportunities of the students. In addition, it can be recommended to focus on trainings for parents on democratic attitudes, the importance of democratic attitudes and how they can establish a relationship with a democratic attitude. Future research should also examine how experiencing ambivalent sexism is associated with life quality and well-being in various society using diverse methodologies and more representative population. Educators, researchers, clinicians, and whole public should be aware of the range of types of sexism to enhance supportive practices for women and to prevent the potentially harmful of consequences.

### Limitation

In this research, a certain group of students was studied. We cannot generalize the views of the students in this study to all Turkish students.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest

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