Individual differences on the importance of virginity in Turkish society: An application on Turkish university students

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Abstract

Virginity is an important issue in Turkish society because of the position of virginity in both Islam and Turkish traditions and customs. As a result of the societal perspective of virginity, Turkish youth see virginity before marriage as an important judgmental value, especially for women. However, it is also observed that the ideas and views of Turkish youth are changing over time and with the influence of personal circumstances. The purpose of this study is to learn the ideas of Turkish youth about the importance of virginity and to depict individual differences by conducting a survey on students of the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences of Eskisehir Osmangazi University. The participants were 664 university students attending different departments of the faculty in 2011-2012 academic year. A questionnaire including one dependent variable as the importance of virginity before marriage and sixteen independent variables was administered to students. QUEST analysis was applied to depict the research findings on a decision tree for more visual illustration. As a result of the analysis the most effective factor on the dependent variable was found students' customs and usage. For the 65.38% of male students virginity is very important before marriage, for whom the customs and usage are important and who use alcohol and attend the third and fourth class, but for the 64.71% of the female students virginity is not important before marriage. The results of the analysis also showed that male and female individuals in Turkish society think in opposite ways about the importance of virginity before marriage.

Key words: Turkish society; Turkish traditions; virginity; university youth; Quest analysis.

1. Introduction

The virginity of unmarried women is of the utmost importance for many cultures; this includes the more traditional parts of Turkish society as well as its modern metropolitan areas. Very often, the wedding night or bridal night turns into a bridal nightmare for women. Their anxiety is

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reinforced by the perpetuation of the archaic custom of the groom's family waiting for the "blooded sheet" as proof of both the bride's virginity and the groom's virility (Cindogdu, 1997)

Female virginity has had special significance for centuries, especially for traditional patriarchal societies. Unmarried women were expected to stay pure and untouched until their wedding night. Being a virgin bride signifies a woman's purity and her loyalty to her family. In a sense, the virginity of the bride is an asset for both her family and the groom's family. Premarital sex has been a powerful taboo and virginity has always been a significant asset for unmarried women in Chinese (Zhou, 1989), Mediterranean (Peristiany, 1966) and Islamic cultures amongst others (Basnayake, 1990). This social anxiety over a woman's virginity has been reflected in taboos and finally in wedding night rituals. The intact hymen of the unmarried woman is material proof of her purity. Any suspicion over her purity may lead the groom and his family to take the bride to consult a physician. Moreover, proof of virginity might be sought through a medical report after the wedding night (Cindogdu, 1997).

Women's premarital virginity is also considered to be owed to the family to protect their honor. An old Turkish saying suggests "it (sexual liaison) is a stain (dishonor/shame) on her face, and henna (the sign of celebration and festivity) on his hand." It is a dishonorable act for women to become sexually involved with men before marriage or outside marriage. Nevertheless, it is a matter of celebration for men. Patriarchal control over women's bodies has been reproduced through honor and shame codes. Honor is essentially concerned with the legitimacy of paternity and is mostly related to men. A man's honor is related to his power to protect the inviability of what is his (Delaney, 1987; Cindogdu, 1997).

Turkey, being one of the first modernizing nations in the Middle East (Jayawardena, 1986), carries traditional Islamic, nationalist and liberal discourses simultaneously (Cindogdu, 1997). Traditional Islamic discourse divides the world into two universes, public and private, and regulates each according to Islamic rules. The public domain is for men and the private domain is for women and children. Olson (1982) states the reflection of this division of domains into everyday life as follows; "One of the most conspicuous dimensions of the separateness of male and female spheres is the spatial or territorial one. In Ottoman times, the ideal was to keep women from having contact with men other than their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons." (Olson, 1982; Cindogdu, 1997)

It is observed that the importance attributed to virginity by Turkish youth has been abating recently in Turkey. The reasons for this change, especially for women include joining the workforce with better jobs and in better positions, and also the feeling of freedom caused by economic independence. Another reason may be the new Turkish generation's relaxed view of virginity.

Besides, different perspectives of male and female students on the issue were observed resulting from different approaches of the parents towards their sons and daughters.

Feachem (1995) determined in his study that sequential surveys have been found to be effective in monitoring any changes in sexual behavior and impact on education campaigns on specific populations (Tydén et al., 2001). Also as Kimura (2002) determined in her study, different sexes approach the situations differently because of their own ideas and she concludes that there are five abilities at which males are on average better than females (spatial orientation, visualization, line orientation, mathematical reasoning and throwing accuracy) and five abilities at which females are on average better than males (object location memory, perceptual speed, verbal memory, numerical calculation and manual dexterity) (Lynn et al., 2004).

Regarding the opinions of individuals on virginity, the individuals' life style, their parents' education levels, their superstitious beliefs, alcohol and smoke usage, parents' situations in life, customs and their usages and living places as city or a town also play important roles. In his study, to put forward the moral code regarding female virginity, Herrara (1918), determined that all the participants considered female virginity to be highly valued by their communities but not all of them agreed with this. For instance, while rural men and women held this image as an ideal, the more educated and urban women questioned and protested angrily against such a prescription. The urban men also considered female abstinente as unimportant and as a value of previous generations. That did not mean there were no negative consequences of their rejection of this norm, however.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to learn the ideas of Turkish youth about the importance of virginity and to depict individual differences by conducting a survey on students of the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences of Eskisehir Osmangazi University.

3. Method and Material

3.1. The place and time of the study

This study was carried out in the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences at Eskisehir Osmangazi University. Time of study was second term of the 2011-2012 academic year.

3.2. Population and sample selection

The participants were 685 university students attending different departments of the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences at Eskisehir Osmangazi University. But because

of the 21 students didn't complete the whole questionnaire, the final data were based on 664 students.

3.3. Type of study

The type of study is causal comparative.

3.4. The variables

The dependent variable for this study is importance of virginity before marriage. Nonetheless sixteen independent variables (students' sex, customs and usages, smoking habits, drinking habits, their grades, having a boy/girl friend, pleasure from life, superstious beliefs, father's education, father's work, mother's education, mother's work, parents' living status, owning any parents', living place, departments at the faculty) used in the study.

3.5. Data collection

3.5.1. Data collection method

A questionnaire including 17 questions was administered to students in university classrooms. It took 15 minutes for participants to complete the questionnaire.

3.5.2. Data collection tools

QUEST analysis was applied to depict the research findings on a decision tree for more visual illustration. QUEST stands for Quick, Unbiased, Efficient and Statistical Tree. The original method is described in Loh et al. (1997). It is a tree-structured classification algorithm that yields a binary decision tree like C&RT. The reason for yielding a binary tree is that a binary tree may allow techniques such as pruning, direct stopping rules and surrogate splits to be used. Unlike CHAID and C&RT which handle variable selection and split point selection simultaneously during the tree growing process, QUEST deals with them separately (SPSS, 2006).

The Quick, Unbiased, Efficient Statistical Trees algorithm is described in W. Y. Loh and Y. S. Shih's (1997) study and the performance of this algorithm compared with other classification methods can be found in the studies of T. S. Lim et al. (2000) (Lampropoulos et al., 2004). This method is quick to compute and avoids the other methods' biases in favor of predictors with many categories. The target variable must be nominal. As a result, QUEST generates a binary tree.

It is well known that exhaustive search methods such as C&RT tend to select variables with more discrete values, which can afford more splits in the tree growing process. This introduces bias into the model, which reduces the generalizability of results. Another limitation of C&RT is the computational investment in searching for splits. The QUEST method is designed to address these problems. QUEST was demonstrated to be much better than exhaustive search methods in terms of variable selection bias and computational cost. However, in terms of classification accuracy,

variability of split points and tree size, there is still no clear winner when univariate splits are used (Answer tree Users Guide, 1998) (SPSS, 2006).

If these three trees are indeed equally accurate, the QUEST tree may be preferred for its simplicity. The common goal in CART and QUEST is to obtain a tree such that the learning sample in each terminal node is relatively pure. When this cannot be achieved with a small number of univariate (i.e. axis-orthogonal) splits, we will get either a complex tree or an extremely simple one (due to overpruning). One solution is to employ linear combination splits but such splits are usually difficult to interpret if they involve more than two variables (Hyunjoong et al., 2003).

QUEST algorithm

For each split, the association between each predictor variable and the target is computed using the ANOVA F-test or Levene's test (for ordinal and continuous predictors) or Pearson's chi-square (for nominal predictors). If the target variable is multinomial, two-means clustering is used to create two superclasses. The predictor which has the highest association with the target variable is selected for splitting. Quadratic Discriminant Analysis (QDA) is applied to find the optimal splitting point for the predictor variable. The process repeats recursively until one of the stopping rules is triggered (Answer Tree Users Guide, 1998), (SPSS, 2006).

Components of QUEST analysis

Basic components in a QUEST analysis are as follows: (Answer tree Users Guide, 1998), (SPSS, 2006).

- One or more predictor variables: Predictor variables can be continuous, ordinal or nominal variables.

- One target variable: The target variable must be nominal.

- Settings for various QUEST parameters: The settings include alpha level for variable selection, priors for the categorical target variable, profit values and misclassification costs, and the variable used as the frequency weight variable.

Data file

This file contains the learning (or training) samples. Each sample consists of observations on the class (or response or dependent) variable and the predictor (or independent) variables plus any frequency variable. The entries in each sample record should be comma or space delimited. Each record can occupy one or more lines in the file but each record must begin on a new line. Record values can be numerical or character strings. Categorical variables can be given numerical or character values. Any character string that contains a comma or space must be surrounded by a matching pair of quotation marks (either ' or "). It is important to make sure that either the data file

or the description file ends with a carriage return. Otherwise, the program will ignore all incomplete lines and may yield false results (Yu-Shan Shih, 2003).

The reason for binary splits is so that the QUEST trees may be easily compared with exhaustive search trees in terms of stability of the splits and number of nodes. In terms of classifcation accuracy, variability of split points, and tree size, our results show that there is no clear winner when univariate splits are used. Sometimes QUEST is better and other times an exhaustive search is better. However, QUEST trees based on linear combination splits are usually shorter and more accurate than the same trees based on univariate splits. The QUEST computer program is many programs in one. Besides implementing the QUEST split selection approach, it has an option for exhaustive search (Wei-Yin Loh et al., 1997).

3.5.3. Data collection time

Data were collected between April and May 2012.

3.6. Limitations of the study

The major limitation of this study was that it was conducted into a small sampling.

3.7. The generalizability of the study

Since findings from this study were collected only from one university, they cannot be generalized to the overall population.

3.8. Research ethics

The study was approved by the faculty administration and researchers guaranteed students that their identities and answers would be kept confidential.

3.9. Evaluation of data

The data was analyzed using SPSS 11.5 and Answer Tree 1.0. The analysis included frequency and percentages and QUEST analysis.

4. Results

In the application part of the study, the aim was to try to put forward the effects on the ideas of all students (685), attending different departments of the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences at Eskisehir Osmangazi University. For this purpose, 17 questions were applied to these students in the second term of the 2011-2012 academic year but because the 21 students didn't complete the whole questionnaire, the final data were based on 664 students.

Table 1. Variables, Variable Levels, Frequency and Percentages

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Importance of virginity before marriage		
Very important	428	64.5
No idea	60	9.0
Not important	176	26.5
Sex		
Male	354	53.3
Female	310	46.7
Whether they attach importance to their customs and usage		
Yes	557	83.9
No	107	16.1
Their smoking habits		
Ever	245	36.9
Occasionally	48	7.2
Never	371	55.9
Their drinking habits		
Ever	253	38.1
Occasionally	156	23.5
Never	255	38.4
Their grade		
First grade	157	23.6
Second grade	171	25.8
Third grade	143	21.5
Fourth grade	193	29.1
Total	664	100

In the application part of the study SPSS 11.5 and Answer Tree 1.0 softwares were used. The analysis was started with one dependent variable (Importance of virginity before marriage) and sixteen independent variables (students's sex, customs and usages, smoking habbits, drinking habits, their grades, having a boy/girl friend, pleasure from life, superstious beliefs, father's education, father's work, mother's education, mother's work, parents's living status, owning any parents's, living place, departments at the faculty), but five of the independent variables, given in Table 1 were found to be statistically effective on the dependent variable as a result of the analysis.

As a result of the QUEST Analysis given in Fig. 1., the most effective factor on the dependent variable was found to be these students' customs and usage (p=0.0000; Chi-Square=55.2591 under 2 degrees of freedom). In these individuals, for whom the customs and usages take an important place in his/her life, the alcohol usages (p=0.0001; Chi-Square=30.9311 under 4 degrees of freedom) and in the individuals who drink alcoholic drinks, their grades at the university were found to be important on these individual's opinions about virginity. From the decision tree it can be easily seen that for the 65.38% of male students virginity is very important before marriage, for whom the customs and usage are important and who use alcohol and attend the third and fourth class, but for the 64.71% of the female students virginity is not important before marriage (p=0.5144; Chi-Square=6.8746 under 2 degrees of freedom).
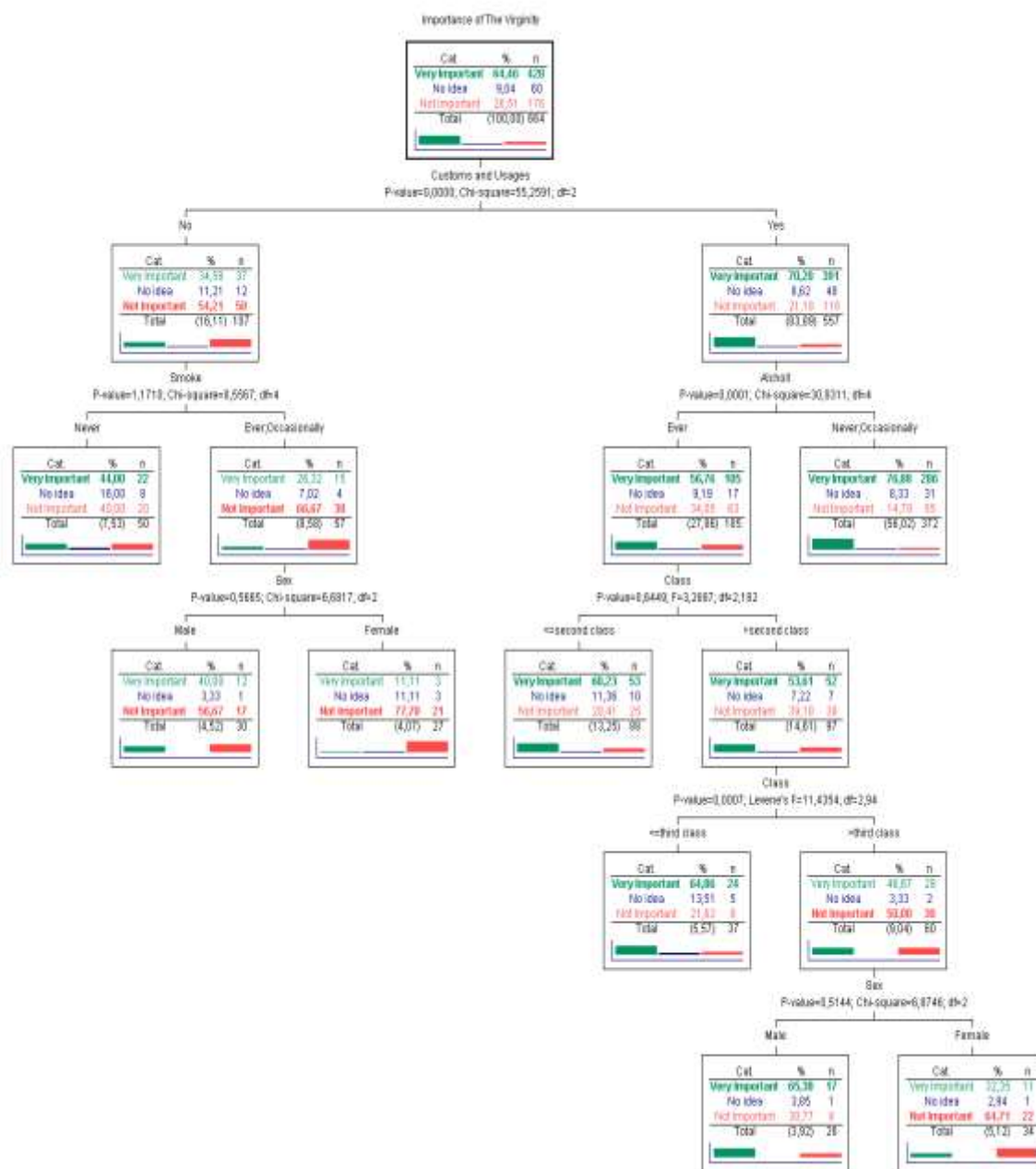
Figure 1. The results of the QUEST analysis.

The results of the analysis also showed that male and female individuals in Turkish society think in opposite ways about the importance of virginity before marriage. While the 77.78% of females, for whom the traditions and customs are not important and never or occasionally smoke, think that virginity is not an important value judgment that must be kept until marriage, 40% of the males in the same category have the opposite opinion (p=0.5665; Chi-Square=6.6817 under 2 degrees of freedom). This is also one of the results that attracted attention from the analysis of individual differences.

5. Discussion

In the Turkish family structure women are more domestic then men (Yilmaz et al., 2005). Because of the limitations resulting from culture and religion, in any culture virginity has an important part in societal values. In different studies before now, the importance of this topic has been tried to put forward. The creation of male and female individuals' different approaches to sexuality make a really big unfairness on women.

In terms of sexual approach, individuals may also have different opinions because of the new and hard living conditions. Especially university youths' behavior, which is open to variation, may be the indicator of the change in the next generations.

As Lewis et al. (2006) determine, in addition to learning how to respond emotionally to sexual stimuli, individuals interpret their gender role regarding appropriate sexual behavior from perceived societal norms (Mischel, 1966). Social learning theory (Mischel, 1966), social cognitive theory (Bussey et al., 1999), social role theory, and script theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly et al., 1986) suggest that gender roles for men and women change over time as a result of diverging social norms regarding sexual behavior. Social norms have diverged for men and women and because our behavior is regulated by these roles, expected and approved sexual behavior differs for men and women (Crawford et al., 2003; Marks et al., 2005; Milhausen et al., 2001; Sprecher et al., 1987). Thus, social norms have historically prescribed greater acceptance of sexual activity outside of marriage for men than women (Reiss, 1960). Anecdotally, especially among young adults, men are socially rewarded by peers for higher instances of sexual behaviors and labels for this behavior are often favorable (e.g., "lucky", "player"). In contrast, higher instances of sexual behavior among women is socially frowned upon and labels for this behavior are invariably derogatory (e.g., "easy", "loose", "slut").

As a result, male individuals generally think that virginity is a value judgment that must be kept until marriage. However, in real life they don't behave in accordance with their opinions. This is their injustice to female individuals. It is clear that while the most of the females give more importance to virginity, male individuals do not. As Duysal (2000) determined in her study, in Turkish society male individuals use more pornography and have more sexual relations than females. In her study which she applied to Turkish university youth before and where she tried to put forward the individual's sexual behaviors and attitudes, male individuals psychologically approached the topic differently than the females. She also put forward that social improvement is necessary. She examined the students' different sexual behavior from the perspective of their conditions of trained places (village-town-city-metropolis), their parents' opinions and the living conditions while they attended university. According to the result of her study on females, there

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were fewer male virgins than females and the age of males at their first sexual relation was younger than for females. In addition, the numbers of males that had short sexual relationships as their first sexual experience was higher than for females. Also in her study she stated that in their first sexual relations females feel more negativity, bashfulness, penitence and anxiety than males. Males feel more comfortable approaching sexual behavior than females.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

As a result of the negative and unfair limitations of the Turkish society on females, the findings of the analysis and studies about this topic are not a surprise. The females' sexual behaviors that are under strict control can be liberated by social change and by females feeling more comfortable and free. In time we hope that this inequality between male and female individuals will diminish. It is true that in Turkish society every new generation gives less importance to their traditions and customs and as a result of this, male and female individuals feel free in their every behavior and behave so.

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