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WHEN INDIVIDUALS HOLD RELIGION AS A COPING TOOL: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF ACCULTURATION PROCESS IN SYRIAN REFUGEES WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract

This study focuses on disabled asylum-seekers, who are often ignored among immigrants but nevertheless encounter many difficulties. The objective of this study is to understand the role of religion in their efforts to overcome the difficulties they face. In order to get first-hand and in-depth accounts, qualitative research methods were used. There were two groups of participants -- six disabled Syrians as the test group and six disabled Turks as a control group. Semi-structured interviews were conducted. The data were analyzed via NVIVO-11 program.

Disabled asylum seekers are at risk in various ways. Importantly, the results show that the religious aspects of their lives are the most important elements that they attach to life. Religious support helps them overcome the hardships they face. There seem to be two reasons for this: First, the religious support is received at no cost to the individual; second, the religion the disabled Syrians believe and practice constitutes the most important point of cultural similarity to the culture of Turkey.

Keywords: Religious Coping, Disabled Asylum Seeker, Syrian, Acculturation, Integration.

Bireyin Dine Başa Çıkma Aracı Olarak Tutunduğu Zamanlar: Engelli Suriyeli Sığınmacıların Kültürel Uyum Süreçleri Üzerine Nitel Bir Araştırma

Öz

Bu çalışmada, birçok zorlukla karşılaşmalarına rağmen, göçmenler arasında sıklıkla göz ardı edilen engelli sığınmacılara odaklanılmaktadır. Çalışmanın amacı, katılımcıların söz konusu zorlukların

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üstesinden gelme çabalarında dinin rolünü anlamaktır. Çalışma, deney grubu olarak 6 engelli Suriyeli ve kontrol grubu olarak da 6 engelli Türkü kapsamaktadır. Derinlemesine, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Veriler NVIVO-11 programı kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir.

Engelli sığınmacılar çeşitli şekillerde risk altındadır. Çalışmanın en önemli sonuçları arasında ise bireyin yaşama tutunduğu en önemli unsurun dini öğeler olduğudur. Karşılaşılan zorlukları aşmada dinden destek alınmaktadır. Bunun bir nedeni olarak birey açısından bu durumun hiçbir maliyetinin olmayışı ve en önemli kültürel benzerlik faktörü olması gösterilebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dini Başa Çıkma, Engelli Sığınmacı, Suriyeli, Kültürel Uyum, Entegrasyon.

Introduction

War is a ruthless malignant creature that burns lives, hopes, dreams, and everything about the future, shakes its ashes randomly, destroys the bodies that come before it, and leaves them missing. Today Syria is dying in the claws of this creature. Millions of people are stepping into an uncertain future, hoping to escape this persecution. To a future, they can't consider lucky to escape.

In the case of the war in Syria that began in 2011, Turkey is one of the main escape routes and is host to the greatest number of refugees. Today, 3.5 million asylum seekers out of a total of 6 million 600 thousand are living in Turkey. Although the number of asylum seekers with disabilities cannot be determined exactly, people with disabilities due to the war, health problems, and other reasons are too many to be underestimated. They are among the most disadvantaged groups and face many extraordinary problems due to being asylum seekers as well as being disabled. Research conducted in Turkey reports that they have problems in areas such as language, rent, housing, unemployment, health care, transportation, and support.¹ When these problems are combined with negative attitudes such as prejudice toward them, discrimination, and disagreement about whether to help asylum seekers and disabled people, the lives of Syrians with disabilities can become difficult.²

¹ Mahmut Kaya, "Türkiye'deki Savaş Mağduru Engelli Suriyeli Mültecilerin Toplumsal Hayata Adaptasyon Süreçleri: Özel ve Kamusal Alan Engelleri", *Diyalektolog Ulusal Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, Denizli, 2017, Sayı: 16, s. 127; Zeynep Sağır, "Sağlık Alanında Farklı Dini, Etnik ve Kültürel Kimliklere Sahip Engelli Yabancı Bireyler İçin Manevi/Dini Danışmanlık ve Rehberlik", *II. Uluslararası Manevi Danışmanlık ve Rehberlik Kongresi*, İstanbul, 2018, s. 54; Sinem Yıldırım alp ve diğerleri, "Suriyeli sığınmacıların toplumsal kabul ve uyum sürecine ilişkin bir araştırma [Öz]", *V. International Balkan and Near Eastern Social Sciences Kongresi*, Kırklareli, 2017, s. 121, Erişim adresi: file:///C:/Users/ELZ/Documents/ContentServer.pdf

² International Disability Alliance Recommendation to Include a Stand-Alone Paragraph on Refugees with Disabilities in the Global Compact on Refugees <http://www.unhcr.org/events/conferences/5afbf0c7/international-disability-alliance-recommendation-include-stand-alone-paragraph.html>, (27.04.2019); Mahmut Kaya, "Türkiye'deki Savaş Mağduru Engelli Suriyeli Mültecilerin", s. 132; Damla Taşkın, *Sığınmacılar ve*

Because asylum seekers with disabilities suffer such serious difficulties in adapting to society, it is important that we understand their problems in depth. Thus, the present study employed in-depth interviews to illuminate the special adaptation problems of disabled asylum seekers. It constitutes a heretofore relatively unexamined issue relevant to the world and Turkish literature on refugee and asylum seeker adjustment by adding knowledge that can help guide social policies to help the disabled.

1. Context

Throughout its history, Turkey has taken in migrants from different countries for many different reasons.³ The refugees who came to Turkey because of the civil war in Syria constitute the largest group of such asylum seekers.⁴ They encounter various problems no matter where they migrate, and these problems function as obstacles to their cultural adaptation to the host country.⁵ Although all individuals who have been forced to migrate have difficulties due to issues such as language and economic barriers, disabled asylum seekers constitute an important risk group not only because of their disabilities but also because they are often ignored.⁶ The United Nations (UN) identifies people with disabilities as those in need of assistance to sustain their daily lives, which indicates that they are automatically thereby at a

Geçici Koruma Altındaki Engelli Suriyeliler İle Engelli Iraklılar: Türkiye'de Sağlık ve Rehabilitasyon Hizmetlerine Erişimlerdeki Sorunları ve Çözüm Önerileri, Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ufuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Ankara, 2018, s. 60-62.

³ Emre Alakuş, *Türkiye'de Göç Yönetimi ve Uygulaması*, Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Bolu, 2018, s. 46-47; Sedat Erten, *Türkiye'de Göç Sorunları Suriye'den Göçün Etkileri Reyhanlı Örneği*, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Mustafa Kemal Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Hatay, 2018, s. 2-3; Hakkı Özbaş, *Türkiye'de Göç Hareketleri ve Bölgesel Sosyo-Ekonomik Gelişmişlik İlişkisi (2008-2012)*, Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Gaziantep Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Gaziantep, 2014, s. 31-46.

⁴ Selçuk Kahraman, *Türkiye'de Göç Yönetimi ve Suriyeli Sığınmacılar*, Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Konya, 2016, s. 87.

⁵ Özge Ruken Ergün, *Geçici Koruma Statüsündeki Suriyeli Çocukların Eğitim Sürecindeki Toplumsal Uyum Sorunları: Burdur Örneği*, Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Isparta, 2018, s. 14.; Raymond F. Paloutzian and Zeynep Sagir, "Forgiving, Reconciling, and Peace-Building in Refugee Contexts: Theory, Research, and Data from the War in Syria" *The Psychology of Peace Promotion*, Springer, Cham, 2019. s. 193-197; Zeynep Sağır, *Kültürel Uyum, Ruh Sağlığı ve Din*, Değerler Eğitimi Merkezi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2018, s. 220-225.

⁶ <http://www.unhcr.org/events/conferences/5afbfe0c7/international-disability-alliance-recommendation-include-stand-alone-paragraph.html>, (27.04.2019).

disadvantage.⁷ Asylum seekers with disabilities can be considered the most at-risk group in society, in terms of both disability and being in asylum status.

There is no comprehensive database that documents the number of asylum seekers with disabilities, either worldwide or locally. The estimated number is 9.3 million, and these people are forcibly displaced⁸ These people have been called the hidden victims of the war, invisible compared to other refugees.⁹ Thus, the present study takes an especially close look at Syrian refugees with disabilities, the differences in opportunities between Turkish and Syrian disabled individuals, and their problems in adapting to the society. Knowledge of psycho-social and cultural adjustment issues ought to help us craft solutions for disabled Syrian asylum seekers, as they try to establish some comfort and safety in what for them is a second, unfamiliar culture. The importance of this issue on humane grounds cannot be overstated if we intend that these people should not fall through the cracks in society and suffer further degradation. It is important that we shed light on and attend to their problems.

1.1. Uniqueness of the Present Research

There are few studies of Syrian refugees in Turkey, and almost none of those with disabilities beyond those by Kaya¹⁰ and Sağır.¹¹ Kaya focused on public and private barriers faced by disabled people in Şanlıurfa. Sağır examined the psycho-social problems of refugees with disabilities to assess whether spiritual support is needed when receiving health care services. The need for more research is obvious. Further, asylum seekers mostly are not aware of the policies or rights granted them and often do not know where to apply for help, making them at a great disadvantage and functionally almost destitute, especially in relatively unpopulated areas. Thus, in addition to shedding light on the social policies needed to help disabled refugees, the present study highlights these concerns as manifest in a relatively rural area such as Elazığ, Turkey.

⁷ Hidden victims of the Syrian crisis: disabled, injured, and older refugees", 2014 by HelpAge International and Handicap International, London, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Hidden%20victims%20of%20the%20Syrian%20Crisis%20April%202014%20-%20Embargoed%2000.01%209April.pdf> , (01.05.2019).

⁸ <http://www.unhcr.org/events/conferences/5afbfe0c7/international-disability-alliance-recommendation-include-stand-alone-paragraph.html>, (27.04.2019).

⁹ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Hidden%20victims%20of%20the%20Syrian%20Crisis%20April%202014%20-%20Embargoed%2000.01%209April.pdf> , (01.05.2019).

¹⁰ Mahmut Kaya, "Türkiye'deki Savaş Mağduru Engelli Suriyeli Mültecilerin", s. 127-144.

¹¹ Zeynep Sağır, "Sağlık Alanında Farklı Dini, Etnik ve Kültürel Kimliklere Sahip Engelli Yabancı Bireyler İçin Manevî/Dini Danışmanlık ve Rehberlik", s. 54.

1.2. Conceptual Framework and Research Questions

Therefore, the present research explores the problems faced by disabled asylum seekers as they try to participate in society. Issues examined include the nature of their daily lives, how they adapt to Turkish culture, the difficulties of being both foreign and disabled while trying to adjust to Turkish culture, and any specific helps or barriers that Turkish culture comes with.

Based on the issues noted above, the overall working hypotheses of the present research are (1) that disabled asylum seekers have problems integrating with society due to identifiable and solvable issues such as language skills development, socialization, and meeting their daily needs, (2) that disabled refugees are often left adrift and detached from the outside world in their everyday lives, and thus left socially, economically, and culturally abandoned to long periods of solitude, and (3) the negative aspects of their migration are eased somewhat because of a history of certain religious and cultural similarities between Turkey and Syria, thus facilitating their adaptation to Turkey.

2. Method

Qualitative methods were used in order to reveal as closely as possible the process and level of socialization into Turkish culture of the disabled Syrian refugees, as compared to the control group of disabled Turkish citizens. This allowed access to their perception of opportunities and general disability problems, both medical and refugee-related, their own understanding of what adaptation to Turkish culture means, and the psycho-social processes involved. Three classes as of objectives have been identified to convey the intent of methods descriptive, interpretive, and evaluation.¹² The present study is best characterized as describing, explaining, and drawing conclusions about the processes that disabled refugees go through, in order to arrive at workable solutions to the problems they face.

A goal of qualitative research is to obtain a more comprehensive perspective.¹³ It enables us to examine individuals in order to get in-depth knowledge, in contrast to more cursory information estimates and generalizations.¹⁴ Also, because the aim of qualitative research is to focus on

¹² Münevver Subaşı ve Kübra Okumuş, "Bir Araştırma Yöntemi Olarak Durum Çalışması", *Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, Erzurum, 2017, Sayı: 21/2, s. 422. <http://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?T=P&P=AN&K=132453831&S=R&D=a9h&EbscoContent=dGJyMNLe80Seprc4y9f3OLCmr1Gep65Ssk24TLOWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMPGuski0qbZNuePfqeyx43zx> (22.05.2019).

¹³ Şener Büyüköztürk ve diğerleri, *Eğitimde Bilimsel Araştırma Yöntemleri*. Pegem Yay., 25. Baskı, Ankara, 2018, s. 252-257.

¹⁴ Said Sami, *Travmatik Kayıp (Ölümler) Sonrasında Dini İnanç Sahibi Olan ve Olmayan Bireylerin*

unique meanings as a needed addition to establishing general findings, its most important aspect is the depth of the information received from participants.¹⁵ Thus, 12 people were interviewed in the present study, in order to dig into the problems of disabled Syrian refugees in great detail.

2.1. Participants

All participants were people with disabilities aged 18 or older living in Elazığ province. Six Syrians comprised the experimental group, six Turks comprised the control group. Each group included three women and three men. Their mean age was 46.5 years. The Syrians emigrated to Turkey between 2014-2018. All participants were interviewed under the necessary legal permissions of the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management (PDMM), the relevant association for the Turkish disabled, and the individuals interviewed. At the request of the PDMM, at any stage of the research, sensitive information such as name, surname, telephone, e-mail address, residence address, and identification with a religion, sect, or ethnic group was not recorded. An appropriate Syrian substitute name is used for each Syrian participant in the written report; the Turkish participants are represented by their names, according to their wishes. All participation was voluntary and anonymous, and participants were free to discontinue participation at any time.

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

The interviews were conducted during February-March, 2019, by the researchers in the safety of each participant's home and neighborhood environment, and in the case of a couple of the Turks, in a nearby comfortable park. Separate interview forms were created for the experimental and control groups. Syrian participants were asked 21 questions in order to assess whether their problems were related to only their disability or to having become disabled asylum seekers and to identify the problems that prevent them from adapting to society and the differences between their former and current cultural environment. The Turkish control group participants were asked 14 different questions designed to illuminate their similarities and differences, and

Ölüme, Yasa ve Sonrasında Yaşanan Sürece Dair Tutumlarının Karşılaştırılması (Nitel Bir Araştırma), Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, İstanbul, 2019, s. 77.

¹⁵ Suat Yapıcı, *Suriyeli Öğretmen ve Veli Görüşlerine Göre Geçici Eğitim Merkezlerinin Değerlendirilmesi: Nitel Bir Araştırma*. Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Marmara Üniversitesi İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim Üniversitesi Eğitim Yönetimi ve Denetimi Ortak Yüksek Lisans Programı, İstanbul, 2019, s. 30.

advantages or disadvantages, due to being different from the disabled asylum seekers. The questions were open-ended, non-directive, and focused. The data was read multiple times and the themes were determined together with the field expert as a using NVIVO-11. The questions prepared to be asked during the interviews were presented to the relevant board in order to determine their ethical suitability and permission was obtained from Firat University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee. The interviews were based on the volunteerism of the participants and the analysis of the interview data was performed by inductive analysis.

3. Results

Let us first present the data that reflect the argument for conducting this research -- the responses of the Syrian disabled refugees, in order to point them out most clearly -- and then compare them with the parallel data for the Turkish control participants.

3.1. Findings for Disabled Syrian Refugees

3.1.1. General Findings

In order to find out whether a disability was war-related, the participants were asked, "How did your disability occur -- because of the war, or for other reasons?" Three origins of the disability were reported: that it was congenital, happened later, or caused by the war. Those with congenital and later-acquired disabilities that were not war related were better able to adapt to society and remain most psychologically health than those with disabilities due to the war. For example, a participant whose disability was due to a war injury said, "Yes. *The lack of a leg causes problems in my adaptation to the society.*" (Ruksan, 44).

In relation to their home country of Syria, being in Turkey afforded the disabled asylum seekers geographic proximity, security, religious similarities, economic options, health facilities, and education. These benefits helped not only the initial refugee who came across the border, but also became an important benefit to their families when they could follow and the family could be reunified inside Turkey. Some of the participants said: "*In Turkey, we are not afraid of bombs. In the evening, we can sleep in a comfortable way ...*" (Khalid, 62); "*If we went to one of the European countries, our children would be born in a Christian country. We came here so that they would not move away from Muslim culture.*" (Hanin, 57).

3.1.2. Problems Encountered Due to Being of Different Ethnic Identity

In addition to the general results that pertain to all Syrian participants, there were a number of findings that seem related especially to their having a different ethnic identity. These are enumerated below.

1. *Discrimination.* The Syrian refugees with disabilities report being perceived and treated differently not only from the general Turkish population and disabled Turks but also from the non-disabled Syrian refugees -- separated and excluded from all other members of the society. Both within institutions and in social and cultural activities, they felt that they were in a more disadvantaged position than Turks who had the same disabilities. They felt the stigma of being alien, an outsider or "other," at all times. They expressed their feelings on this subject as follows: "*When I go out, people look at me very carefully. So I don't want to go out. Maybe they look differently at the Turks who are in the same situation as me, but they look at me differently because I am both disabled and Syrian.*" (Ruksan, 44); "... *The problems are the same but of course, they [the disabled Turks] can get salary and help. Since they are in their own country, they can find solutions to their problems faster and easier than us. They also provide monthly salaries to disabled people with citizenship. I don't have monthly disability salary because I am not a citizen, even though my situation is worse than theirs.*" (Hanin, 57); "*They don't want to give us a house to live in because we're Syrians.*" (Khalid, 62).

2. *Rights.* Most disabled Syrian refugees in Turkey are not aware of their rights and do not benefit from them. Those who were aware said they knew that there was an amount of money regularly given to their relatives in different cities, which they wanted to be given to them also. Disabled Syrians who were not aware of their rights said: "*I do not know what my rights are. There is no income that the state has attached to us ...*" (Ruksan, 44); "*I don't know anything. I don't know what my rights are.*" (Khalid, 62).

3. *Language.* Perhaps the most important problem faced by the disabled Syrian asylum seekers is language. Because they cannot speak Turkish, it is difficult for them to find quick and lasting solutions to problems. Also, the disabilities make it difficult for them to attend language courses. Here are some of their statements: "*We are happy to go be with our Turkish neighbors and chat with them. But not being able to speak the same language prevents it.*" (Khalid, 62); "*I would love to go to a language course. My brothers are going. They are very hardworking, but like I said, I can't go.*" (Hanin, 57).

4. *Economic problems.* The lack of regular employment or income causes disabled asylum-seekers financial difficulties. They are unable to meet their

basic needs, and may be deprived of health services. In addition, only two had wheelchairs; the others did not. Thus, some of them could not move from one room to another. They said things such as: *"At least they can give us a job so that we can meet our basic needs ourselves. It is very difficult to live without our own income."* (Ruksan, 44); *"If I wasn't like that or I had a cordless chair, I would go out more. I would be in touch with people..."* (Hanin, 57).

5. *The location is not suitable for the disabled.* Among the most basic needs is an appropriate place for people to live. People with disabilities face barriers that can greatly restrict their options, because the physical structure, height of household steps or implements, or ability of a disabled person reach for or use a tool is restricted. These limitations are apparent in their following statements: *"It is clear that disabled asylum seekers are not able to live in their homes and therefore find it difficult to meet their needs. The lack of an opportunity to choose or change their place of living affects their situation negatively. This circumstance is one in which asylum seekers with disabilities are disadvantaged compared to disabled Turks. "Our house is on the 4th floor and has no elevator."* (Khalid, 62).

"Everything is so hard. It's hard to move and meet my needs. In our home, there is old-style toilet. I can't use it. I could use a toilet bowl, but they don't give Syrians a better home. Even the variations of them are very expensive. We wanted to change the house but it doesn't seem possible." (Hanin, 57).

6. *General societal attitudes.* Because the general attitudes in society ought to be important to the adaptation process of disabled Syrian asylum seekers, they were asked, "What do you think of the society's perspective on you?" Some stated that Turks generally had a positive attitude, but that it was not reflected in their behavior – i.e., they did not give them a job or housing opportunities, and there were other negative expressions by the Turks. This is an indication that the prevailing attitudes of the society towards the asylum seekers have become more negative during the period between 2011 and 2018. The Syrian's statements reveal this: *"Not all people are the same. For example, they help when they see us in the street; they are optimistic. So sometimes I think the Turkish people do not hate us, but sometimes the opposite. They do not make our jobs easier. They do not sell to the Syrians in the market and do not rent houses to us. My brother does not work."* (Hanin, 57); *"When we first arrived, everyone was very helpful, but since 2018 the benefits have been cut."* (Rital, 38).

7. *Loneliness.* Because the disabled Syrian refugees could not participate in ordinary society due to both their disability and being a foreigner, they were completely isolated from most social life. They stated that they had no contact with the Turks living around them and that this fostered loneliness. They were

mostly at home and did not do anything else. The lack of contact with their Turkish neighbors, even in their place of residence, reveals that asylum seekers with disabilities were in complete isolation. This is apparent in their statements: *"I sit all day and I feel the need to make friends and chat with someone. If I could do that, I wouldn't feel lonely, but that's not the case."* (Hanin, 57); *"... I am always at home not doing anything different. We came to Turkey only because to be survive. There was not anything we could do to participate in life."* (Ruksan, 44).

3.1.3. The Daily Life of Disabled Syrian Refugees

The Syrians with disabilities reported that except for two simple activities they did at home, they could not socialize. They were content to do various activities (most importantly those reflecting their religion) and to try to learn Turkish with the aid of television and the internet. They mostly socialized through individual religious activities, and generally do not do anything in their daily lives other than perform religious rituals such as going to mosques, praying, and giving thanks. In contrast, Jamal and Sharif, two interviewees who are members of an association for people with disabilities, said that they came together with disabled Turks and participated in painting, reading, playing baglama, and swimming courses. It seems clear that asylum-seekers with disabilities who participate in such associations are better off than those who do not. Their answers reflect this: *"... I mostly spend time on the internet and watch television."* (Sharif, 38); *"I'm just going to the mosque. Our television is also broken so I just go to bed and do nothing else."* (Khalid, 62); *"Some days of the month I participate in activities, various trips, and activities in the Association of Spinal Cord Paralysis, of which I am a member. I'm dealing with painting, calligraphy and vase decoration. In the summer we go swimming with the family."* (Jamal, 47).

3.1.4. Barriers to Cultural Cohesion

1. *Wish to return to their home country.* Most disabled Syrians said they wanted to return to their home country; a few said that they wanted to stay in Turkey. Those who wanted to return the most stated that family members were still in Syria and that they love their homeland; they tended to try to engage with Turks the least. Those who wanted to stay in Turkey tended to acquire the new culture. Asylum seekers with disabilities have expressed this as follows: *"Even though I love Turkey very much, I would like to return to my country, and end the war in Syria. Because my daughters live there."* (Khalid, 62); *"If the situation in our country improves, I hope we will go."* (Ruksan, 44); *"I'm happy to live in Turkey, I don't want to go back to Syria."* (Henin, 57).

2. *The language spoken at home.* In order to find out the extent to which Syrian refugees with disabilities had adapted to Turkish culture, they were asked: "Which language do you speak more at home?" They said they speak Arabic at home and that only children and young people who went to school speak Turkish. The disadvantaged status of the disabled asylum seekers was a barrier to their learning a new language because it was very difficult for them to be in the necessary environment to learn Turkish. "*We speak more Arabic. I have two children who go to school and they speak Turkish among themselves.*" (Jamal, 47); "*I'm having language problems. Most of the time we don't understand each other. Since my nephews went to school, they can speak Turkish well, and when they translate, we can understand.*" (Sharif, 38); "*We speak Arabic at home all the time. Sometimes we also say Turkish words with my brothers and sisters who go to the course, but mostly Arabic.*" (Hanin, 57).

3.1.5. Factors that Facilitate Cohesion

1. *Cultural similarities.* In a society in which people from two different cultures try to live together and there is low participation by the group that happens to be immigrants, several questions come to mind: "How exactly can cultural harmony be achieved?" [To the immigrant group] "Do you love Turkish culture?" and "Do you think you have achieved cultural harmony with the Turkish community?" The participants generally said that they felt good about Turkey and think positive thoughts about it. The wish to integrate into Turkish society was high; the immigrants were not alienated cultural elements such as religion, dress preferences, Turkish music, customs, or ways of preparing food. They felt close to their own culture, as indicated in their statements: "*Clothes, songs, customs, religious life, family environment, that is, relative relations are all very close to Syrian culture. There are many similarities.*" (Sharif, 38); "... *We are similar in many points. We are not very different from each other with our religion, customs, social life...*" (Jamal, 47).

2. *Demand for socialization of disabled Syrian refugees.* In order to find out whether the participants wanted to take part in the society or spend time with Turkish individuals, they were asked, "What activities would you be happy to do with the Turks?" They indicated that they would be happy to participate in social activities with the Turks if an appropriate environment was formed and they felt a desire to do so. For example, they said: "*I would love to go back and forth with mutual hospitality, to give and receive food with the neighbors, to sit and drink tea, to chat. It makes me and my family happy.*" (Jamal, 47); "*I wish I could do activities. I would love it and it doesn't matter what we do.*" (Rital, 38); "*I*

want to stay outside for longer, to see the bazaar. I only know the street and the mosque I live in. I want to see other places." (Khalid, 62).

3. *Feeling of belonging.* Disabled Syrian refugees were asked the extent to which they felt it would be important to adapt to where they were, via the following question: "How do you feel about being part of Turkish culture?" The rate to which the participants felt they belonged within Turkey is not falling below 70%. They made the following statements: *"If I rate my belonging, I would say 80%. We even share our history. All of this makes it easy to feel belonging."* (Jamal, 47); *"As I said before, we are alike, so I feel close. I don't go out much, but I love the congregation I saw in the mosque. We cannot agree because of the language problem, but we pray to the same God. Which makes me feel like I belong there. I can tell you that I feel 80% owned."* (Khalid, 62).

3.2. Findings for the Turkish Handicapped

There are similarities and differences between how the disabled Syrians and disabled Turks responded to the questions. They help us see those benefits and helps that are available to newcomers as well as the work needed to be done in order to improve the lives of all disabled people, especially the refugees. Under this heading, the status of Turkish disabled people being aware of their rights, the problems faced by Turkish disabled people, the advantages of Turkish disabled people over asylum-seeking disabled people and the attitudes of Turkish disabled people towards Syrian disabled people are included.

3.2.1. Rights

Turkish disabled individuals were asked, "What are your rights as a disabled person in Turkey? Are you aware of the law?" They were aware of the rights granted to them as evident in various answers to the above question: *"... We have rights, so we try to make use of them as long as we are aware."* (Merve, 18); *"We know what our rights are through the Internet and social media."* (Salim, 41).

3.2.2. Problems Faced

The difficulties and barriers encountered by disabled Turks are far fewer in number and more generic than those faced by the disabled refugees. Illustrative instances noted by our interviewees are summarized below.

1. *Spaces ill-equipped for the handicapped.* In response to the question, "What are the problems you encounter in your social life?" Turkish people with disabilities stated that their problems revolve around the limitation of

movement during the day and that various spaces are not designed for the disabled. Some of them said: *"When I go out, I suffer from sidewalks very much. We have expressed this a lot but the sidewalks are not suitable for our chairs."* (Mehmet, 21); *"There is no elevator in our apartment and when my father is not at home, I crawl up and down with the help of my arms. This forces me very hard."* (Merve, 18).

2. *Social integration of Turkish disabled people.* According to their answers, it was seen that disabled Turkish individuals do not see themselves as different from the society and establish good relations with the society. According to the information obtained, it was seen that they did not see their barriers as a factor that would make it difficult for them to communicate with people and they accepted their situations, they were able to cope with it, and having relatives with them positively affected them. Some participants responded: *"I go to my relatives, I go out every day in summer."* (Hediye, 57); *"I do not think we are different from society, I see myself the same."* (Salim, 41).

4. Comments and Comparisons on Group Differences

4.1. Advantages of Disabled Turks over Disabled Syrian Refugees

4.1.1. Activities

In order to identify the daily activities of disabled Turks that differ from those of disabled asylum seekers, the disabled Turks were asked, "Do you have social activities? If so, what are they?" Answers revealed that engage in various activities through the association for people with disabilities, and individually participate in social life. Their membership in the association affects them positively, helps them acquire an identity, and functions as a group of friends. Their answers clarify this: *"In our association, I agree with them that there are playing baglama and painting courses within the scope of the SODES project. We have a project where we will exhibit the paintings we have done during the week of the disabled."* (Salim, 41); *"If the association calls me, I go to their activities. We all went to Sivrice together recently. They sent us to Hajj with the disabled people in the association. In addition, I go to relatives and bazaar."* (Hediye, 57); *"I go on trips organized by the Association. I went to the baglama course, swimming course in the association, for example."* (Merve, 18).

4.2. Social Acceptance

When exploring their perceptions of how disabled people were seen, the participants were asked, "What do you think of the society's point of view?" Their answers were that Turkish people love and accept Turkish people with disabilities. Some of their answers indicate social acceptance: *"I've always met*

good people. My family, friends, relatives, neighbors ... Everyone tries to help me as best as they can." (Merve, 18); "They love, I have never seen evil in my environment. When I go out they always give me a priority." (Semra, 54).

4.2. Attitudes of Disabled Turks toward Disabled Syrian Refugees

4.2.1. Contact with Disabled Syrians

Turkish individuals with disabilities, who come together both in their individual social lives and through the association, stated that the only contact they had with disabled asylum seekers was through association membership; they had hardly ever met a disabled Syrian asylum seekers. Their answers indicate this: "There was a Syrian painter in the association, I saw him only. We do not understand each other, but it is difficult to understand what each other is saying. I never talked to him. But he makes beautiful pictures." (Hediye, 57); "There is a Syrian disabled in the association, yes. But I have not met any other Syrian disabled except him" (Merve, 18); "I met only one person. I recognized him through the association. Computer engineer, also painter. I don't know anyone else" (Okan, 20).

4.2.2. Prejudice towards Disabled Syrian Refugees

Most disabled Turks did not know of disabled Syrian refugees, and those who did showed biases because they had received incorrect information: "In fact, they say that the state allows them, they enter universities without points. If it is true, I do not think they have many difficulties" (Mehmet, 21); "I just want the war in their homeland to go away. Everyone is happy in their homeland. Since they came here, we have had many problems. Hopefully, everything will be corrected and gone immediately." (Hediye, 57); "I think their lives are more difficult. After all, they have left their homeland. They have to live in a foreign country. But I think if we went to Syria they would not accept us." (Semra, 54).

4.3. Comparison of Experimental and Control Group Findings

4.3.1. Activities of the Participants

Disabled refugees perform religious activities only at home. They spend all their time at home. Some even do not change rooms during a day. They do not participate in an outside life. In contrast, the disabled Turks, through various associations, have opportunities to paint, to play baglama, take swimming courses and various trips, and participate in the theater, be on stage, and occasionally receive awards. Turkish disabled people are more active than disabled refugees, as is evident in that each Turkish person with a disability attends at least one of these activities.

4.3.2. Awareness of Participants' Rights

Disabled refugees understandably do not know what rights they have in Turkey. They have not been informed of them, and therefore are not able to benefit from them. Disabled Turks, on the other hand, are aware of their rights through various associations, the internet and television, and receive those services they can access.

4.3.3. Discrimination Felt by Participants

In addition to their difficult lives due to having to escape a war, disabled refugees have to cope with being different. They experience exclusion and discrimination due to living in a country as an asylum seeker, as well as living with disabilities. Disabled Turks do not feel the parallel because they live in their own homeland with their own culture.

4.3.4. Facilities Available to Participants

Disabled Refugees cannot benefit from opportunities to receive a monthly income for the disabled, caregiver salary, a cordless chair, health services such as rehabilitation and physical therapy, and so on. Disabled Turks are able to receive these benefits.

4.3.5. Socialization

Disabled refugees don't have the opportunity to socialize and learn much about Turkish society. Instead, because of their isolation, they intonate as if they feel they are living in a prison. They may engage in some social communication at home via the Internet. Religious activities may be especially important because, for example, the only activity one may go to is attendance at mosque. Given the two disabled asylum-seekers who were interviewed, most others cannot easily come together with others. They generally lack in-group or out-group contact. Some of the asylum-seekers with disabilities were able to come together with similar individuals by joining an appropriate association designated for this. But such individuals differ from others mentally as well as socially. It may be that specialized forms of group therapy may facilitate asylum-seeking disabled and non-association members finding common ground.

Disabled Turks are more socially active than their Syrian counterparts. They go out, visit friends, and engage in various activities. They come together with individuals who are in their own situation – other disabled Turks. They are lucky in being able to do more things with people like them. Because of this, they feel thankful and state that they feel more fortunate.

4.3.6. Community Access and Belonging

Because disabled refugees usually do not have a wheelchair, they see their disability as a major obstacle to belonging to and participating in their local community. They imagine that they belong to Turkey in some socio-cultural sense, but this feeling is realized only in the abstract. Except for two of the disabled asylum seekers, others do not feel much sense of belonging in their community. In contrast, because their children associate with others because they attend school, adapting is easier for the children than it is for their parents.

In contrast, because disabled Turks have a wheelchair and can go out at any time, they are less prone to see their disability as an obstacle. Thus, they participate in community activities more easily.

4.3.7. Loneliness

Disabled refugees often stay at home all day. They have less contact with others and sometimes have no relationship with anyone else in the community. They often live a life isolated from society. Disabled Turks, on the other hand, may often venture out in their wheelchairs. Nested with other members of the community, they are more able to have a full and richer social life.

4.3.8. Participants' Problems

General difficulties caused by disability adversely affect the lives of both Turkish and Syrian disabled people. Both groups experience similar problems in their movements and have the same needs. But the disabled refugees also have to cope with the economic and spiritual problems of being an asylum seeker in a foreign country. They have to live with the sadness, longing for home, and psychological pressure created by having left family members behind. Add to this the language barriers noted above, and it is understandable that it is difficult for them to find solutions to problems posed by living in a new culture.

Discussion

Mass migration movements affect people in many difficult ways. For refugees and other asylum seekers, the problems include being a non-citizen in the place to which they migrated, and thus not having the rights that citizens have. This is one of the biggest human problems today.¹⁶ Moreover, the great

¹⁶ Özgür Soysal, "Evrenselcilik-tikelcilik Gerilimi Işığında Ötekilerin Kaderi", *Özgürlük, Eşitlik ve*

human mobility of today creates many new problems for both the indigenous peoples and immigrants in the receiving countries.¹⁷ Syrian asylum seekers, the first group that comes to mind when thinking of migration to Turkey, are facing the problems of adapting to the society. Baritci,¹⁸ Sağır,¹⁹ and Yılmaz²⁰ demonstrated that the biggest problem faced by Syrian asylum seekers in adaptation to society is not speaking the language. The present study found that asylum seekers with disabilities were affected by not speaking Turkish and felt that they needed to learn it more than others in order to adapt. However, consistent with our hypotheses, their disabilities often prevented them from being able to participate in a language school. The same conclusion was reached by Mete,²¹ who stated that the society has developed a discriminating stance towards Syrian asylum seekers. However, asylum seekers with disabilities felt this discrimination more acutely because they were in an especially disadvantaged group. In the future, it will be important to increase the awareness of and help provided for disabled asylum seekers in provinces throughout Turkey.

The present study shows not only that Syrian disabled people face important problems, but that they can be supported by their religion while dealing with the traumatic events both during the war and with adaptation problems they face after migration. This was an expected result in that the disabled refugees turned to positive religious coping activities. Pargament²² and associates examined individuals' positive religious coping tendencies in their past lives. One of the most positive supports they received was in the context of

Kardeşlik Birinci Uluslararası felsefe kongresi, İsmail Serin (ed.), Asa Kitabevi Yay., Bursa, 2010, s. 495, [http://ataturkilkeleri.deu.edu.tr/ai/uploaded_files/file/Felsefe%20Kongresi.pdf](http://ataturkilkileri.deu.edu.tr/ai/uploaded_files/file/Felsefe%20Kongresi.pdf) (27.04.2019).

¹⁷ Serdar Ünal, "Türkiye'nin Beklenmedik Konukları: "Öteki" Bağlamında Yabancı Göçmen ve Mülteci Deneyimi". *Zeitschrift für die Welt der Türken Journal of World of Turks*, 2014, Sayı:6/3, s. 67.

¹⁸ Fatih Baritci, "Suriyeli Mültecilerin Türk Toplumuna Uyum Süreci Üzerine Bir Araştırma". *Uluslararası Hakemli İletişim ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Fatih_Baritci/publication/321716114_SURIYELI_MULTECILERIN_TURK_TOPLUMUNA_UYUM_SURECI_UZERINE_BIR_ARASTIRMA/links/5b6ca5fd299bf14c6d97d2b0/SURIYELI-MULTECILERIN-TUERK-TOPLUMUNA-UYUM-SUERECI-UeZERINE-BIR-ARASTIRMA.pdf (1.1.2020).

¹⁹ Zeynep Sağır, *Kültürel Uyum, Ruh Sağlığı ve Din*, s. 220.

²⁰ Hilal Yılmaz, *Adjustment Experiences of Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Findings from a Community - Based Participatory Research*, Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü; Ankara, 2018, s. 27.

²¹ Hatice Mete, *Local Peoples' Perceptions on Syrian Refugees in Turkey: The Case of 'gün' Groups*, Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent Üniversitesi/ Ekonomi ve Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, İstanbul, 2018, s. 9.

²² Kenneth I. Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice*. Guilford Press, 2001, s. 285-314.

their religious attitudes and behaviors (for example, going to the mosque to pray). One's religion can function as both contributing their sense of belonging to the new culture and as an important factor in facilitating their socialization with others in the new culture. This indicates that one's religion may help individuals live more comfortably in difficult times.²³ This was important for the participants' well-being and mental health, as their tendency toward positive religious coping helped them have less depression, anxiety, or hopelessness.²⁴

Conclusions

Disabled Syrian refugees fall into the category of severely disadvantaged people in every sense. Some of their key needs are noted below.

1. The Syrian refugees with disabilities due to the war were more psychologically withdrawn, more deficient in various ways, and had a lower tendency to engage in society than those whose disabilities were not due to the war.

2. The Syrian refugees felt generally comfortable in Turkey because the religion and sects in Syria and Turkey share some features, and because the parents of the refugee children could feel comfortable that their children would grow up in a country with some religious and cultural similarities to their former homeland.

3. Because Turkey has many of the same religious characteristics that the participants saw in Syria, they were able to feel that they were under the same religious umbrella in their new culture. This shows that they received support from the religious beliefs and practices in Turkey.

4. The disabled asylum seekers tend to think that the host society sees them as separate and different from others, and therefore they abstain from participating in social life with them.

5. The Syrian participants were, in general, not aware of their rights. Whether or not they had formally received information about their rights, they were aware of only what they heard from those around them.

6. What distinguishes disabled asylum seekers from others with disabilities is that in addition to their disability, they are in a foreign country with a foreign language and must adapt to it.

²³ Halil Ekşi, *Başa Çıkma, Dini Başa Çıkma ve Ruh Sağlığı Arasındaki İlişki Üzerine Bir Araştırma*, Yayınlanmamış Doktora Tezi, Uludağ Üniversitesi SBE, Bursa, 2001, s. 29; Ali Ayten, *Tanrı'ya Sığınmak-Dini Başa Çıkma Üzerine Psiko-Sosyal Bir Araştırma*, İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2012, s. 49.

²⁴ Paloutzian, Raymond F., *Invitation to the Psychology of Religion*, Third edition, New York: Guilford Press." 2017, s. 298.

7. Their material and associated needs tend to be non-ordinary. For example, they may be deprived of social assistance and thereby be unable to get even a wheelchair, which is a common need for disabled people. However, their wish to engage with others in a normal way means that they will do if minimal needs such as wheelchair access are available.

8. The disabled asylum seekers felt that although the Turkish population welcomed them when their initial migration began in 2011 and shortly thereafter, they began to wish that they would either migrate elsewhere or return home as the decade came to a close.

9. Because disabled asylum seekers face barriers that make it difficult for them to participate in society, they are often left to live as outsiders, separate from most others, even though they feel they have much to offer. This adds to their loneliness.

10. Except for two of the participants, they did not participate in outside activities, and could not socialize. Their primary social contact occurred through their religion.

11. The two participants who were members of an association with activities for the disabled found the membership to be advantageous. It fostered contact with others and a sense of identity that comes from being part of a group in which those with disabilities could talk about their problems with others who also have them. This social outlet also helped them to become more open to acquiring the new culture. In addition, these participants were fortunate to have cordless wheelchairs provided by the association. The benefits to the disabled refugees to being members of such an association, in stark contrast to those who are not, are many.

12. Arabic was the native language for all Syrian refugees, and that is the language used at home. But the family members who went to school also learned to speak Turkish. The disabled refugees often did not go to school and therefore were not in an environment in which they would learn Turkish. Being relatively isolated and uninvolved socially, learning the new language was less available to them. Nevertheless, it is very important that they overcome the language barrier, because it is the key to accessing all of the benefits of their new environment.

13. The asylum seekers report that they love Turkish culture and are willing to integrate and acquire the new culture.

Recommendations

Religion, language, and cultural similarities play an important role in facilitating the integration of traumatized war refugees into the Turkish society,

let alone refugees with disabilities. But research on such persons is scanty. More research is needed to map out the terrain for how to best treat and care for them. Given that their numbers are not known, that they are especially at risk and need special care, and face barriers unknown to others, we recommend that the following steps be taken.

1. Spiritual counselors can be considered to play an active role for Syrians with disabilities. This is a necessary support among other important psychological supports.

2. The language barrier faced by immigrants should be overcome by the establishment of voluntary "integration clubs" established in universities, secondary schools, and local agencies. Turkish lessons should be given gratis to the members of such clubs, which may be effective for disabled asylum seekers who by circumstance may be able to participate on only days of the week. This would benefit the state and general society as well as individuals.

3. Disabled Syrian refugees should be brought together with disabled Turkish people and these two groups should be taught both the Turkish and the Syrian language. This will benefit asylum seekers with disabilities in terms of their socialization, and function somewhat as an alternative for variations of multi-group counseling.

4. Associations that promote the integration of immigrants, including disabled asylum seekers, into society should be established and their social activities should be promoted among diverse groups.

5. On special occasions (such as eid el-fitr, eid al-adha) and holidays, which are frequently emphasized by disabled asylum seekers and sometimes common to Syrians and Turks, they can be brought together and celebrate in harmony in the association of the two cultures.

6. Events should be held in which volunteer university students, members of integration associations, and disabled asylum seekers come together and teach, cook, and share life together. The co-mingling of people from multiple cultures will contribute to the integration of disabled asylum seekers into society.

7. The Syrian and Turkish and asylum-seekers with disabilities should participate in courses such as painting, playing baglama through integration associations.

8. In order to ensure that disabled Syrian refugees adapt and communicate within Turkish society, they (if possible) should be given guidance in accord with their professions or abilities prior to immigration and helped to further develop their skills once in Turkey.

9. The number of disabled asylum seekers within each province should be assessed, and social policies should be regulated according to their number and status.

10. The disabled asylum-seekers have the same rights as disabled Turks in terms of benefiting from the Red Crescent. They should be informed of this and be enabled to receive the benefits in accord with their rights.

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