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Effects of Religious Participation on Social Inclusion and Existential Well-Being Levels of Muslim Refugees and Immigrants in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Being a refugee or immigrant brings many difficulties that can detrimentally affect well-being. Participation in social life and feeling included in the host country can play an important role on well-being. This article aims to investigate the effects of religious participation and social inclusion on well-being levels of refugees and immigrants. Data were collected from 97 participants who were enrolled in voluntary Turkish language courses for refugees in Istanbul. Results of path analysis indicated that religious participation enhanced the level of social inclusion and social inclusion fostered existential well-being. Although religious participation demonstrated no direct effects on existential well-being, it showed a significant and positive indirect effect through social inclusion. Results of difference tests indicated that participants with higher level of education attended to religious activities significantly more often and their existential well-being and social inclusion levels were higher as well. Results also demonstrated that social inclusion scores of high attenders (to religious activities) were significantly higher.

The context and background

Geographically, politically, and culturally, Turkey stands as a pivotal actor placed in the heart of the contemporary refugee and immigrant issues of the world. Bridging the Middle East and Europe, Turkey is located close to the countries where people face major crises such as ethnic, religious, and political conflicts and war. Over the last decades, there have been a number of disputes in countries such as Iraq, Palestine, Oman, and Syria that are in Turkey's geographical, cultural, and historical hinterland. More than 180,000 nationals of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, and Syria were accepted by Turkey between 1995 and 2006 (Kirişci, 2007, p. 94). Recently, the conflicts near Turkish borders became more severe with the "Arab Spring" and Syrian War. In 2011, with the increased intensity of the conflicts in Syria, Turkey declared an "open door policy" and thousands of refugees and immigrants crossed Turkish borders, some considering Turkey as a bridge to Europe but most as a residence. In 2014, in the numerous camps along the border, more than 735,000 Syrian refugees were registered, and the number becomes much larger with the ones who are unregistered (Kirişci, 2014). The United Nations reports that the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey is higher than 1.6 million (Balkan & Tumen, 2016; İçduygu, 2015).

The sociocultural structure of Turkey provides an enabling and welcoming nature for many Arabic speaking countries, as the cultural values, climate, customs, food, and social structure possess many common characteristics. A comparison of the cultural values through the well-known dimensions of Geert Hofstede reveals similarities among Turkey, Syria, Egypt, and Iraq (Hofstede, 1984, 1991, 2001). All mentioned cultures are characteristically high on collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and power

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distance, with congruent scores (for details see www.hofstede-insights.com). One main determinant and base for these communalities is the religion. The vast majority of the people in Turkey and in Arabic-speaking countries that Turkey receives most of the refugees and immigrants from are Muslims (e.g., Egypt, Syria, Oman, Iraq, etc.).

The conditions of refugees and immigrants and the importance of study variables

Starting a new life in a foreign county as an immigrants or refugee comes with many difficulties. Moving away from the home country, culture, and comfort zone brings strong challenges socially and spiritually. Everything that makes an individual feel safe, comfortable, and contented changes dramatically when there is a need for immigration to another country. Added to that, people going through major negative experiences, such as war, may be more prone to question the meaning and direction of their lives. Alienation, lack of meaning, and lack of life satisfaction are expected outcomes during such drastic and pervasive changes. A new life, a new culture, and a new society stand along with many uncertainties threatening the resources people gathered throughout their lives.

According to conservation of resources theory, individuals aim and struggle to retain and protect their valuable resources. Any threats addressing them cause stress, which is detrimental to well-being (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011). People leaving their resources in their home country, and facing various possible threats to lose more of them, experience significant loss in their well-being. In order to cope with such a situation, what they have are the resources they could carry with them personally and the ones they will rebuild. Establishing good relationships with others and being socially accepted become more significant with given circumstances. The personal pillar of these resources is their beliefs and identities. Individuals feeling isolated and lost hold on to what is the same or similar to their lives back home. Using the help of collective religious experience (with the people from host country), particularly by participating in religious activities, they can experience higher levels of social inclusion and well-being. Added to that, the religious activities are performed in the same language and the same way in the host country, with minor differences. Immigrants' needs for existential meaning, social belonging, and psychological comfort surge upward with moving into a new culture, and "religion brings meaning, belonging, and comfort" (Hurh & Kim, 1990). In this article, we aim to investigate the effects of religious participation on social inclusion and existential well-being of refugees and immigrants. We suggest a positive association between social inclusion and existential well-being as well.

Existential well-being

Spiritual well-being is conceptualized and commonly measured in two factors: existential well-being and religious well-being. Religious well-being is about the individual's feelings and perceptions in terms of his or her relationship with God (Musa & Pevalin, 2012). It contains aspects such as God's help, interest, and support for the individual's life. Existential well-being, on the other hand, is more about having a direction, purpose, and sense of meaning in life, being satisfied with life, and feeling optimistic about the future (Ellison, 1983). Thus, religious well-being stands for increased quality in the relationship with God through religious practices, while existential well-being focuses on how the individuals relates the self with others and the environment (Musa & Pevalin, 2012). In our study, we preferred to consider existential well-being rather than religious well-being. Considering the aforementioned needs and given circumstances of our target sample, existential well-being prevails as a very critical concept that entails extensive investigation. Cohen, Mount, Tomas, and Mount (1996) provided evidence for the link between existential well-being and quality of life. Comparatively, existential well-being demonstrates stronger links with positive outcomes than religious well-being does (Edmondson, Park, Blank, Fenster, & Mills, 2008). The article addresses religious participation as the independent variable and focuses on the social inclusion of the refugees and immigrants; thus,

existential well-being provides a stronger base for the associations among variables. The nature of the existential well-being concept characterizes a broader state that individuals may realize through various ways. However, religious well-being is more dependent singly on religiosity (Edmondson et al., 2008).

Social inclusion

Social exclusion and inclusion do not have an agreed-upon definition yet. Literature provides a distinction about social inclusion on the dichotomy of "Ethnos" and "Demos" concepts. "Demos" is more about the formal rights given with the citizenship, while "Ethnos" refers to a "sense of cohesion" and "identification" through shared values and cultural community (Berman & Phillips, 2000; Huxley & Thornicroft, 2003). Consistent with the "Ethnos" concept, Room (1997) and Huxley et al. (2012, p. 1) define social exclusion with "inadequate social participation" and "lack of social integration." Being a part of and identifying with a community are essential contents of social inclusion. In line with the "Demos" concept, scientists also take formal citizenship or legal rights and opportunities such as insurance, job, and so on as social inclusion. Following the "Ethnos" perspective, in our study, we take social inclusion as a state where quality social relationships are built, individuals do not feel isolated, and instead they feel socially accepted.

Religious participation, social inclusion, and existential well-being

Religion and social life are strongly linked in many ways. One of the main pillars that define religion is the perspective (extrinsic perspective) that considers it as a "social system" where people conceptualize their place in the world collectively (Páez et al., 2018). Social aspects such as "being part of a family" or "feeling united with other people" are considered as the social factor of the religious affect, along with immanent and transcendent factors of the concept (see Argyle & Hills, 2000). This affectual and social nature of religion provides a theoretical base for the associations between religiosity, social inclusion, and well-being. Individuals feeling socially accepted through religious participation can experience higher levels of well-being.

Religion has a multifaceted structure. Religious involvement, salience, participation, and belief are commonly studied forms of religion, which may associate with other constructs in sophisticated and various ways (Cohen, Siegel, & Rozin, 2003; Hill & Pargament, 2003; Rossano, 2008). Thus, the form of religiosity is significative. We addressed religious participation as the independent variable for our research purpose. One reason for focusing on religious participation is the nature of the concept that stands for a more collective and social form of religiosity. Through religious participation, individuals engage in social interaction. The more the immigrants and refugees interact with the host country's social life, the more they build competencies to adapt their behaviors in line with the host culture and enhance the possibility of being considered a member of it. As sense of belonging and acceptance are the essential components of social inclusion (Bailey, 2008; Freiler, 2001), and religious participation will increase the social inclusion levels of immigrants and refugees.

Building relationships with the host community is imperative for refugees for constructing social belongingness (Beirens, Hughes, Hek, & Spicer, 2007), and the competence for establishing "culturally prescribed social relationships" is crucial for well-being (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998, p. 916). In order to create such relationships, individuals must learn and adapt to local artifacts, models, symbols, habits, and practices (Fiske et al., 1998, p. 917). A convenient and spontaneous way for observing and learning about the local culture is participating in religious services. When individuals engage in religious and spiritual events, they observe and experience more of the local culture. They have the chance to see rituals, ceremonies, and behavior patterns during such events. The time before and after the religious events provides opportunities to get in touch with the local people and their culture. Experiencing the behavior patterns, rituals, and habits of locals, observing the artifacts and symbols that are visible in the religious institutions, and the opportunity to interact with local people foster and enable the adaptation and inclusion process. As

their experience in the host culture increases, people get more motivated to think and learn about the culture. Their curiosity and knowledge about the host culture grow, and this reflects in their behaviors. People behaving in accordance with the codes of the host culture will be better accepted by the society and feel more included.

Another reason for religious participation to be crucial for well-being and social inclusion is that it is a form of actual behavior. The well-known William James–Lange theory of emotions (see Cannon, 1987) suggests that feelings and thoughts may be evoked by actions. On many occasions, doing may be more effectual than feeling or thinking. An example for this may be the findings of Thornton and Camburn (1989), which suggest religious participation is more important than religious affiliation in determining sexual attitudes and behaviors. Religious practice was rated as the most important aspect of religiosity by Jews and Protestants (Cohen, Siegel, et al., 2003). Participation is visible for the others in the society (local and foreigners) and forms a perception of being a part of the group.

According to social identity theory, individuals determine whether they belong to a social group or not by defining the boundaries of that group, and "perceived similarity" and "frequency of interaction" are factors that form a group (Gundlach, Zivnuska, & Stoner, 2006). More religious participation will increase the frequency of interaction with the host country's society, and as the religion stands as a common ground, religious participation will increase the perception of similarity as well. While defining and constructing the self-concept, using the same grounds and elements with the people of the host country provides a stronger social inclusion for immigrants and refugees. For Turkey, a main basis of social identity that most of the population use for defining themselves is being Muslim. A study conducted to investigate the perceptions of Turkish people toward refugees revealed that people with higher levels of religiosity perceive Syrian refugees more positively as a benefit than a threat (Topal, Özer, & Dokuzlu, 2017). In addition, most religious events and ceremonies that take place in the public religious facilities (masjids and mosques) are in Arabic language as the original book of the religion, the Quran, is in Arabic. Religious fellowship and frequently hearing your first language in a different country increase the sense of social inclusion and acceptance. Moreover, one of the most emphasized core principles of the Islamic belief system is that every individual is same in the eye of God, and regardless of their race, ethnicity, nationality, or social status, everyone becomes equal and one in the religious services. This may act as an important factor for refugees or immigrants to feel included in the society they live in.

Oneness, unity, and sameness felt in the religious services can support social inclusion and psychological well-being as well. Hurh and Kim (1990) demonstrated that religious fellowship made Korean immigrants in the United States feel psychological comfort and personal solace, and religious participation became more extensive and intensive than it used to be in the home country. There are numerous studies linking different forms of religion and well-being (e.g., Koenig, 2012; Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Witter, Stock, Okun, & Haring, 1985), with some of them addressing the Muslim population (e.g., Abu-Rayya, Almoty, White, & Abu-Rayya, 2016). Among other religiosity factors (such as praying), religious participation dominated as the strongest factor to explain well-being in the extensive study of Cuñado, Sison, and Calderón (2011).

Social inclusion (or exclusion), social acceptance, and social belonging concepts are linked with forms of well-being by numerous studies (e.g., Cramm & Nieboer, 2015; Steger & Kashdan, 2009). Particularly, there is empirical evidence for the association between social inclusion and subjective well-being of refugees (e.g., Correa-Velez, Gifford, & Barnett, 2010; Mesch, Turjeman, & Fishman, 2008; Potochnick, Perreira, & Fuligni, 2012).

Feelings of inclusion and acceptance yield to higher levels of life satisfaction and sense of direction in life and protect against alienation. Engaging in religious practices buffered the negative impact of discrimination on well-being for Muslim women in New Zealand (Jasperse, Ward, & Jose, 2012).

Social identity theory constructs a foundation for the mechanisms underlying the ties between religion and well-being as it relates social elements with self-concept, especially in the face of uncertainties (Hogg, Adelman, & Blagg, 2010). Theory suggests that the social identification of an individual to a religious group offers a sense of inclusion, support, and guidelines. Results of numerous studies

supported the link between religiosity and social support (Moreira-Almeida, Lotufo, & Koenig, 2006). Participation in religious activities leads to stronger family and community socialization, motivation toward education, and academic success (Regnerus, 2000). Another well-established link to complete the basis for our suggestion is the one between well-being and social support. In the case of negative events such as compulsory immigration, this link becomes more essential to prevent negative affect. Nezlek and Allen (2006) demonstrated that the links between well-being and negative events were weaker for individuals who received more social support. Empirical support places social inclusion as the underlying mechanism for the relationship between religious participation and well-being. Krause and Wulff (2005) demonstrated that church attendance was positively linked with social support and sense of social belonging, and in turn, social inclusion was associated with higher levels of satisfaction and health. Consistently, Al Zaben et al. (2014) found that social bonds, powered by religious practice, enhance life satisfaction.

The gap in the literature

Despite the importance of religion in understanding various crucial aspects of social and psychological lives of individuals, empirical studies on the effects of religion on well-being became a center of attention very recently. While there is significant evidence on the relationship between religion and well-being in the literature (for meta-analysis see Hackney & Sanders, 2003), the scarcity of research is particularly notable on the underlying mechanisms of religion and well-being association (Cohen, Yoon, & Johnstone, 2009). Possible social components of the picture depicting the well-being religion association have been neglected. An understudied aspect of well-being is social inclusion. Although there are significant studies that provide evidence for some components operating in the relationships between religion and well-being (see Ellison & Levin, 1998), very few studies have focused on the possible social paths. Greenfield and Marks (2007) provided evidence for the relationship between more frequent formal religious participation and subjective psychological well-being. They underlined the need for further examining the concepts that tie religion and well-being. Páez et al. (2018) addressed the same gap and highlighted the contributions of the social aspects of religion to well-being. Lack of specificity on the aspects of religiousness in such relationship is another gap that entails further investigation (Superville, Pargament, & Lee, 2014). The Páez et al. (2018) findings provided evidence for the relationship between attendance to collective religious rituals and satisfaction with life, while private religiosity showed no significance. This stresses the importance of the form of religiousness. Despite the essentialness of the research entailed by the unique conditions of refugees and immigrants, effects of religious facets on their social inclusion and well-being remain as a gap, especially in Turkish context.

Given the nature of the gap in the literature, we address religious participation as a possible antecedent for social inclusion and existential well-being. Particularly, we suggest that religious participation will increase social inclusion and that social inclusion, in turn, will enhance higher levels of existential well-being. Given the pattern of extant evidence and theoretical foundation, we suggest the following hypothesis:

- H1: Religious participation has a positive and significant effect on social inclusion.
- H2: Social inclusion has a positive and significant effect on existential well-being.
- H3: Religious participation has a positive and significant effect on existential well-being.
- H4: Religious participation has a significant indirect effect on existential well-being through social inclusion.

Method

Participants and procedure

The participants were enrolled in classes in a voluntary program that aims to provide Turkish language courses for immigrants and refugees. The questionnaires were handed in written form to the classes. In

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Variable	Category	*n*	%
Gender			
	Female	41	57.7
	Male	56	42.3
Marital status			
	Married	28	28.9
	Single	69	71.1
Nationality			
	Syria	52	53.6
	Egypt	18	18.6
	Palestine	15	15.5
	Oman	7	7.2
	Iraq	5	5.2
Education			
	Elementary school	2	2.1
	High school	29	29.9
	University	66	68.0

order to collect healthy data and control the common method bias effects, we explained the procedures to participants and declared that anonymity would be assured. We clearly stated that the purpose of the study was purely scientific and data would not be used for any other reasons. The present sample consisted of 97 individuals. Table 1 depicts the descriptive statistics of the sample. All participants identified themselves as Muslim. The majority of the participants were from Syria (54%), followed by Egypt (19%), Palestine (15%), Oman (7%), and Iraq (5%). All participants' native language was Arabic. The majority of the participants were university graduates (68%); 58% of the respondents were male; and 29% were married. Average age of the respondents was 26 years (SD = 7.88) with a maximum of 45 and a minimum of 18.

Measures

Existential well-being

Existential well-being levels of participants were assessed using the subscale of the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS), which is a widely used scale that measures spiritual well-being in two factors: existential well-being and religious well-being (Ellison, 1983; Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982). The scale has been proven to be valid and reliable in various studies. It was used among individuals from different religions, languages, or cultures. An extensive study to validate and translate the scale into Arabic was conducted by Musa and Pevalin (2012). They indicated high levels of construct and content validity for the scale and evaluated it as a psychometrically strong tool to measure spiritual well-being of Muslim individuals. Cronbach's alpha score for the current sample was .80.

Social inclusion

We used the Social Inclusion Scale (SIS) developed by Secker, Hacking, Kent, Shenton, and Spandler (2009) to assess social inclusion levels of the participants. Secker and Wilson (2015) examined the scale for test–retest reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity, and they reported high validity and reliability scores. Cronbach's alpha score for the current sample was .90. The scale has three submeasures: Social Acceptance, Social Isolation, and Social Relations. Social Acceptance stands for the sense of being included as a member of the society. An example item is "I feel accepted by my neighbors." Social isolation defines lack of social contact with the society and being lonely; an example item is "I have felt terribly alone and isolated." Social relations dimension is about the quality of the relationship with others; an example item is "I have done some cultural activity."

As all of the participants' native language was Arabic, we used measures in the Arabic language. The Social Isolation Scale is a widely used scale but it was not yet translated into Arabic. In the

current study, a back-translation method was utilized for the Social Inclusion Scale. This method is widely used and recommended (Musa & Pevalin, 2012). It enables necessary adaptations for the specific cultural context and keep the original meaning so the participants understand the items and the scale represents the same concept. A bilingual expert on the field translated the English scale to Arabic and then another bilingual expert translated this product back to English. The translations were compared and the representations of the original meanings of the items were checked. Necessary changes were made. A pilot study to test understandability of items and instructions was conducted with five Arabic native speakers. No changes in the items or instructions were considered necessary.

Religious participation

A single item asking respondents' number of participations in religious and spiritual events in the last month where more than one person gathered together was used for measuring the religious participation levels of respondents.

Method of analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA through AMOS) and reliability tests (through SPSS) were conducted to analyze the factor structure of the constructs we used in the study. Pearson correlation analysis was used for understanding the associations among study variables. We utilized Harman's single-factor test in order to check for common method variance. In order to test the hypothesized associations of the study we used structural equation modeling in AMOS (Arbuckle, 2006) with bootstrapping analysis (Preacher & Kelley, 2011). Point estimates and 95% confidence intervals were generated with 500 bootstraps; *t*-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to analyze differences among categories and groups.

Results

Factor analysis

We conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) on the data set in order to analyze the indicators of fit for each multi-item scale and the measurement model. The results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated good fit for each measure we used and the measurement model. Table 2 demonstrates the fit indexes. All of the χ^2/df values are lower than 2.5, the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), incremental fit index (IFI), and comparative fit index (CFI) values are greater than (or very close to) 0.9, and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) lower than 0.08 level indicates a good model fit (Arbuckle, 2006; Bentler, 1990; Hu & Bentler, 1998).

Variables demonstrated high reliabilities (.80 to .90). With the Cronbach alphas at acceptable levels and the results indicating adequate fit indexes, we kept the structures as in the original scales.

Table 3 presents the correlations among variables. None of the correlations exceeds the .60 benchmark level; results indicate no issues for multicollinearity (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). There are some significant correlations among demographic variables and variables in the study model. Thus, further analyses were controlled for age, gender, and education. Results indicate significant relationships in the expected directions among hypothesized variables except that the correlation analysis did not

Table 2. Fit indexes for measures and measurement model.

	χ^2/df	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA
Existential Well-Being Scale	1.24	.97	.97	.96	0.05
Social Inclusion Scale	1.67	.91	.91	.89	0.08
Measurement model	1.50	.93	.93	.91	0.07

Table 3. Pearson correlation, mean, standard deviation, and reliability of variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	*M*	*SD*	α
Age	1						25.9	7.88	–
Gender	−.100	1					1.42	0.49	–
Education	.319**	−.083	1				2.65	0.51	–
Marital status	.600**	.054	.023	1			1.29	0.45	–
Religious participation	.176	−.183	.361**	−.013	1		2.35	1.42	–
Social INclusion	.076	.022	.496**	−.057	.273**	1	3.66	0.46	.90
Existential well-being	.058	−.004	.168	.004	−.009	.493**	3.54	0.66	.80

Note. The variables were coded as follows: gender (0 = male, 1 = female), education (0 = elementary school, 1 = high school, 2 = university), martial status (0 = single, 1 = married). Total $N = 97$.

provide evidence for an association between religious participation and existential well-being. These insignificant correlations do not necessarily dispel the possible indirect effects of religious participation (Hayes, 2009; Preacher & Hayes, 2008); thus, further analysis will also be addressing these associations.

We utilized Harman's single-factor test in order to check for common method variance. We fixed the number of factors to be extracted to 1 and let all items to load in a single factor. The results indicted very low explaining power, as the total variance explained was less than 40% for the Social Inclusion Scale (the only multifactor scale we used in the study). This indicated a better fit for multidimensional structures of scale and suggested that the scores indicating associations are not inflated and the study is not significantly affected by common method variance.

Path analysis

Results of the path analysis demonstrated that religious participation had a significant positive effect on social inclusion (point estimate = .09, $p < .05$), supporting hypothesis 1. Results also provided evidence for the positive and significant effect of social inclusion on existential well-being (point estimate = .75, $p < .01$), and thus hypothesis 2 is supported. Results of the path analysis indicated no direct effect of religious participation on existential well-being, so hypothesis 3 was not supported. It is possible for a variable to have indirect effects on a dependent variable despite its insignificant direct effect (Hayes, 2009, p. 413). The indirect effect of religious participation (a point estimate of .06, $p < 0.05$) on existential well-being was significant in the path analysis. Bootstrapping analysis supported the significance of the indirect effect ([.31, .117], $p < .05$). Figure 1 depicts the results of the path analysis.

Difference tests

We conducted *t*-tests and ANOVA to analyze whether there are significant differences between categories of demographic variables to address the questions about possible impacts of demographic differences on social inclusion, religious participation, and existential well-being.

Results of the *t*-tests (Table 4) revealed that participants with higher level of education attended religious activities significantly more, and their existential well-being and social inclusion levels were significantly higher as well. Results did not demonstrate any significant

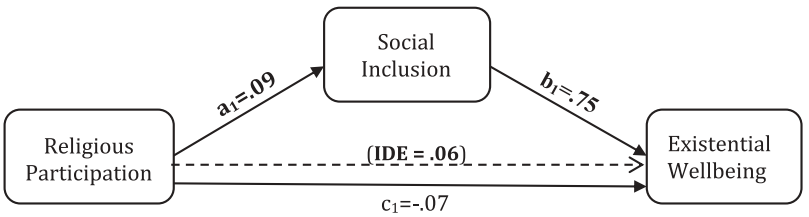

Figure 1. Results of path analysis. Significant effects are in boldface. IDE = indirect effect. a_1, b_1, and c_1 depict the direct effects. The indirect effect of religious participation on existential well-being through social inclusion is the product of the respective $a_1 \times b_1$ paths.

Table 4. Results of *t*-test analysis.

Variable	Category	*n*	*Mean*	*SD*	*t*	Significance
Social inclusion	High school	29	3.31	.506	−4.957	.000
	University	66	3.82	.354		
Existential well-being	High school	29	3.34	.696	−1.99	.049
	University	66	3.63	.637		
Religious participation	High school	29	1.66	.974	−4.062	.000
	University	66	2.70	1.478		
Social inclusion	High attender	30	3.87	.331	3.206	.002
	Low attender	67	3.56	.489		
Existential well-being	High attender	30	3.61	.713	0.669	.505
	Low attender	67	3.51	.638		
Social inclusion	Age < 26	63	3.63	.519	−0.743	.460
	Age > 26	34	3.71	.357		
Existential well-being	Age < 26	63	3.51	.635	−0.777	.439
	Age > 26	34	3.62	.708		
Religious participation	Age < 26	63	2.22	1.385	−1.213	.228
	Age > 26	34	2.59	1.480		

difference between genders and married and single participants for any of the study variables. We grouped the sample in accordance to people's religious participation levels, as high attenders (attending religious events more than five times a month) and low attenders (attending religious events less than five times a month). The *t*-test results revealed that high attenders' social inclusion scores were significantly higher than low attenders' were. Age did not show any significant correlations with study variables, and *t*-tests results where we divided the group by the mean score of the age (older than 26 and younger than 26 years) demonstrated parallel results. ANOVA results demonstrated that nationality does not indicate any significant difference for any of the study variables.

Discussion

The context and characteristics brought by the circumstances of fleeing and immigration entail investigation of possible antecedents of well-being as a very crucial matter. In the case of Turkey, possible drivers of well-being for the refugees and immigrants from Arabic-speaking countries emerge as religious participation and social inclusion.

Particularly, built on conservation of resources theory, social identity theory, extant literature, and empirical evidence; current investigation suggested positive effects of religious participation on social inclusion and existential well-being. Results supported the direct effects of religious participation on social inclusion and social inclusion on existential well-being. Findings provided no evidence for a direct effect of religious participation on existential well-being, but its indirect effect through social inclusion was supported. These findings are consistent with the findings provided by Lun and Bond (2013), which demonstrate that existential well-being depends on the religious symmetry between the individual and the country; what matters more is whether the religion of the individual is the dominant one in the host country or not, instead of religious salience or participation. Blaine and Crocker's (1995) findings also demonstrated no significant direct association between religious participation and well-being.

Findings of the current study are in line with the findings of Páez et al. (2018), which demonstrate that attendance to religious rituals has an indirect effect on well-being and that social support plays a mediating role on the relationship. Findings of Edmondson et al. (2008) also positively link social support with existential well-being.

Findings of the current investigation regarding religious participation are consistent with the empirical findings in the extant literature, which accentuate religious socialization as an important dynamic for well-being. Lun and Bond (2013) conducted a cross-cultural study and demonstrated that there is

a positive relationship between spiritual practices and well-being in societies where religious socialization is high and the relationship becomes negative when religious socialization is low.

Demographic differences may play a significant role in religious participation. Chatters, Taylor, and Lincoln (1999) indicate higher levels of religious participation for women and for married, older, and more educated individuals. Their results provided no significant effects of income level on religious participation. The findings suggesting higher levels of religious participation for women may be reversed for Muslims because religious tradition and guidelines make it compulsory for a man to attend the noon prayer every Friday in the public religious facilities (mosques). Although it is not compulsory for women to attend noon prayers on Fridays with others, they are still obligated to pray five times a day. There is a special area for woman to pray in the mosques. They frequently attend to prayers like "teravih prayer" (a common prayer performed at nights during the holy month of Ramadan), and women come together for different kinds of prayers and spiritual events at each other's houses. That is one of the reasons for why we considered participation in religious events as not a formal structure but "any spiritual or religious event that more than one person attends." The results of the independent-sample *t*-test showed that there is no significant difference between male and female participants on this variable.

The *t*-test results demonstrate that, considering religious participation, low attenders are significantly at higher risk for lower social inclusion. Nonstudents may be at higher risk because their levels of religious participation, social inclusion, and existential well-being are significantly lower. This may be explained with the opportunities for being able to engage in a structured and constant religious social group in the university, which may provide more frequent and deeper social interaction through religious events. None of the variables indicated any significant difference for nationality.

Findings contribute to the literature by proving further understanding of the links between religiousness and well-being through addressing an understudied concept and mechanism such as social inclusion. Although the context of the study provides a unique and important nature that enables certain contributions to extant literature, understanding the nature of association in this context alone stands as a critical necessity; particular characteristics of the context (e.g., cultural similarity between the home and host countries and sharing the same religious identity) limit the generalization of the study findings. The same model conducted within a county where Muslims are not the majority of the population may provide different results. Another limitation on the same matter is the small sample size. The circumstances of the population make it difficult to collect data. The reader should also bear in mind that the study is conducted with a sample where respondents' education levels were higher than the general refugee and immigrant population.

One of the conditions for mediation "temporal precedence" (see Mathieu & Taylor, 2006) is not assured for the association between religious participation and social inclusion. As the current investigation was not designed as an experimental or longitudinal study, findings do not provide information on whether religious participation yields to social inclusion or individuals attending to religious events are simply more social. Results did not support the direct effect of religious participation on existential well-being as well. Hence, we did not seek for mediation. On the other hand, Hayes, (2009, p. 413) argues that in the case of an insignificant direct effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable, not testing indirect effects may lead investigators to "miss some potentially interesting, important, or useful mechanisms by which X exerts some kind of effect on Y." Thus, we investigated the indirect effect of religious participation on existential well-being and findings supported the indirect effect. The *t*-test results investigating whether there are significant differences between high attenders and low attenders revealed that the two groups differed significantly for social inclusion but not for existential well-being. Some implications on the direction of the causality of the relationship between religious participation and social inclusion can be inferred from the findings of Aydin, Fischer, and Frey (2010), which showed (in an experimental research design) that socially excluded individuals demonstrated higher levels of personal and social forms of religiousness and religiousness is used as a successful coping mechanism for dealing with social

exclusion. More investigations, especially ones designed as experimental or longitudinal studies, may further enlighten this link.

Conditions brought by the processes of immigration or being a refugee can create possible threats to well-being and a state of social inclusion; enhancing religious participation may provide a way to cope with those threats. Better opportunities for education and religious participation may provide higher levels of social inclusion and well-being for refugees and immigrants. From another point of view, for refugees and immigrants, participating in religious events may increase the social inclusion and social inclusion may act as a way to foster well-being. Further studies examining possible pathways and mechanisms on this relationship (and different forms of well-being) can further enhance our understanding of the dynamics between religion and well-being.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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