Summary
Attitudes of University Students towards Syrians in Turkey: A Scale Development Study

Hayriye Güleç[1]

Bursa Uludağ University

Meltem Arslan Karaca[2]

Bursa Uludağ University

Gözde Başkaya[3]

Bursa Uludağ University

Selçuk Karaca[4]

Bursa Uludağ University

Nilay Kahraman[5]

Bursa Uludağ University

In the refugee crisis following the civil war in Syria, Turkey has been the country accepting the highest number of Syrian refugees into its territory. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey was reported to be 3,541,572 as of July 19, 2018 (UNHCR, 2018).

Immigrants and refugees are mostly accepted as homogeneous groups and findings related to the attitudes of the individuals in the host countries towards migration are often generalized across the groups (Finney and Peach, 2004; Schweitzer, Perkoulidis, Krome, Ludlow, & Ryan, 2005). Murray and Marx (2013) showed that the attitudes of Americans towards immigrants and asylum seekers who entered the country legally were more positive than immigrants who entered the country illegally. In another study, intergroup anxiety was associated with attitudes of Turks towards both immigrants and refugees, while pathogen-related disgust was associated only with attitudes towards refugees (Aral, Sevi ve Aydinli-Karakulak, 2016). These findings suggest that the status of the groups and the reasons for migration may affect the attitudes of the individuals in the host countries (Murray and Marx, 2013).

Turkey hosts the most refugees in the world (UNHCR, 2018). Attitudes towards Syrians in Turkey are mainly studied using opinion polls and in-depth interviews. In a study conducted by Hacettepe University Center for Migration Research in 11 provinces, almost half (45.1%) of the respondents stated that they expect Syrians to return to their country (Erdoğan, 2014). The majority (76.5%) considered that the presence of Syrians in Turkey would cause a significant social problem. (Erdoğan, 2014). Granting citizenship to Syrian refugees (84.5%) was one of the most rejected issues (Erdoğan, 2014). In the 2015 report of Middle East Strategic Research Center, the negative attitudes towards Syrians were found to be about the differences in language, culture, and lifestyle, the concerns related to community peace and security, the restriction of job opportunities, and the capacity and service problems (Orhan and Senyücel Gündoğan, 2015).

Although opinion polls indicate that public attitudes towards Syrians are negative in Turkey, more systematical evaluation of these findings is required. The scales that were developed to examine attitudes towards Syrians mostly included items from other scales which measure attitudes towards immigrants in general rather than newly developed items specifically tailored to capture the Turkish context (Keles, December, Lightning, Kurtoğlu and Sunata, 2016). Besides, conceptual evaluation of the item content and factor structure of the newly developed scales were mostly lacking (Kılcan, Çepni and Kılınç, 2017; Köksal, Köksal and Köksal, 2017). The aim of this study is to develop the "Attitudes towards Syrians Scale". For this purpose, an item pool was prepared concerning Syrian refugees' adaptation and integration issues in Turkey and the psychometric properties of the scale was investigated in two studies conducted with university students. Also, the factor structure and item content of the scale were evaluated with respect to intergroup relations.

Study I

Method

Participants and Procedure. One hundred and eighty-four university students from Bursa Uludağ University participated in the study (Female: 101; Male: 83). The mean age of the participants was 21.94 (SD = 2.75) years.

Address for Correspondence: Asst. Prof., Hayriye Güleç, Bursa Uludağ University, Faculty of Arts & Sciences, Department of Psychology, Görükle Campus Nilüfer / Bursa
E-mail: hayriyegulec@uludag.edu.tr

Attitudes towards Syrians Scale. An item pool consisting of 45 items was formed after reviewing the literature, and the written and oral media in the local and national press. After the initial inspection of the item pool, 34 items were accepted. Opinions from seven psychologists, two academicians, and one sociologist were obtained to examine the content validity of the scale. Eight more items were removed from the item pool using the formula proposed by Lawshe (1975). Following this procedure, the scale was administered to 25 psychology students at Bursa Uludağ University to examine the understandability and comprehensibility of the item pool. After deleting one item and rewriting four items, the final scale consisted of 25 items (8 positively and 17 negatively worded attitudes). Participants indicated their level of agreement with each item on a five-point Likert-type scale ("Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Undecided", "Agree", "Strongly agree"). A minimum of 25 points and a maximum of 125 points were obtained from the scale. Higher scores indicated negative attitudes.

Results

Factor structure. Three factors were identified with eigenvalues greater than one. After deleting four items under multiple factors which had factor loading differences less than .10, the total variance explained was calculated as 54.56%. After rotation, the first factor explained about 20% of the variance, the second factor explained about 18% of the variance, and the third factor explained about 16% of the variance. Factor loadings varied between .54 and .78.

Item-Total Correlations. Item-total correlations ranged between .40 and .74 and provided support for the item discrimination of the scale.

Internal Consistency. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the total scale score was .93 and indicated perfect internal consistency of the scale.

Discussion

The first factor was composed of items related to intergroup anxiety and social dominance orientation. Intergroup anxiety is associated with avoidance and social distance from the outgroup (Stephan, Ybarra and Rios, 2016). Similarly, social dominance orientation is concerned with opposition to the equality of the groups and a tendency to maintain the superiority of the ingroup through unequal and dominance-based treatment of outgroup members (Sidanius and Pratto, 2004). Since intergroup anxiety and social dominance orientation are closely related to discriminatory behaviors, the first factor of the scale was identified as "discrimination".

The second and third factors of the scale were associated with realistic threats. According to Intergroup Threat Theory, realistic threats manifest themselves at the group and individual levels (Stephan, Renfro & Davis, 2008). Perceived group threats are concerned with ingroup's power distance, access to resources and well-being as a whole. Whereas, realistic individual threats are concerned with perceived threats to the individual members of the ingroup. The second factor of the scale was associated with threat perception at the group level and identified as "realistic group threats". The third factor was associated with personal consequences of the threat and therefore, was identified as "realistic individual threats".

Study II

Previous studies indicated that perceived symbolic threats and attitudes towards diversity are associated with prejudice and discrimination against immigrants (Stephan, Ybarra and Rios, 2016; Verkuyten, 2006). To this end, two new items were added to the item pool. Besides, an item related to capacity and service-related attitudes was added to find out more about whether realistic threats are disaggregated between the group and individual levels. A second study was conducted to evaluate the factor structure of the scale.

Method

Participants and Procedure. Three hundred and seventeen university students from Bursa Uludağ University participated in the study (Female: 209; Male: 108). The mean age of the participants was 21.3 (SD = 3.06) years.

Statistical Analysis. A two-step procedure was used to evaluate the factor structure of the scale. First, the data were split into two random sub-samples. Exploratory factor analysis was performed on the first random split-half. On the second random split-half, the fit of the scale was investigated using *exploratory factor analysis conducted within the confirmatory factor analysis framework* (Brown, 2006).

Results

Exploratory Factor Analysis. Data were analyzed for 165 randomly selected participants. Three factors were identified with eigenvalues greater than one. However, all but two items under one factor also loaded on other factors with factor loadings of .40 and above. Therefore, a two-factor solution was chosen in terms of parsimony. After repeating the analyses to extract two factors, the total variance explained was calculated as

55.85%. The first factor explained approximately 31% of the variance, and the second factor explained approximately 25% of the variance. Factor loadings ranged between .53 and .87. The internal consistency reliability coefficient calculated for the total scale score was .93.

Exploratory Factor Analysis Conducted Within The Confirmatory Factor Analysis Framework. Data were analyzed for 152 randomly selected participants. The fit of the model was acceptable (CFI = .914; TLI = .901; RMSEA = .077; SRMR = .069). The modification indices indicated that associating an item, which initially loaded under the second factor, with the first factor of the scale would improve the fit of the model (CFI = .936; TLI = .926; RMSEA = .067; SRMR = .057). The item was replaced under the first factor as it was considered theoretically acceptable. Based on the modification indices, allowing the error variance of an item to covary with the error variances of two other items under the same factor would improve the fit of the model. Given the exploratory nature of the study, it was decided to remove the item from the scale. Removing the item improved the fit of the model better than allowing its error variance to covary with the other items. After these modifications, the model had good fit (CFI = .958; TLI = .951; RMSEA = .055; SRMR = .055). The factor loadings ranged between .46 and .80, and the factor loading of each item on its respective factor was statistically significant.

Item-Total Correlations. Item-total correlations ranged between .38 and .73 and provided support for the item discrimination of the scale.

Item-mean differences. According to the t statistics, item-mean scores between the upper and lower 27% groups were significantly different at p < .001 level.

Relationship between the "Threat Scale" and the "Attitudes towards Syrian Scale". The correlation between the total scale score and the Threat Scale (Karaoğlu, 2015) was positive and statistically significant (r (315) = .88, p < .001).

Internal Consistency. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the total scale score was .92.

Descriptive Statistics. Participants tended to respond to the items associated with the first factor as "strongly disagree" and "disagree", whereas they responded to items related to the second factor as "strongly agree" and "agree".

General Discussion

In this study, the psychometric properties of the "Attitudes towards Syrians Scale" were investigated in two separate studies. The results indicated that the two-factor structure of the scale accounted for 56% of the total variance and had a good fit. Item-total correla-

tions and statistically significant item-mean differences between the upper and lower 27% groups provided evidence for the item discrimination and validity of the scale. The Cronbach's alpha for the total scale score was .92 suggesting perfect internal consistency. The positive and significant correlation with the "Threat Scale" (Karaoğlu, 2015) demonstrated that both scales measured similar constructs, which provided evidence for the construct validity of the scale. According to these findings, the "Attitudes towards Syrians Scale" proved to be a reliable and valid instrument with sufficient psychometric properties.

The first factor of the scale included all the items observed in the first study, and similarly, it was defined as "discrimination". It consisted of items related to intergroup anxiety and social dominance orientation. The two factors of the first study, which were "realistic group threats" and "realistic individual threats", were reduced to a single factor. It was named as "realistic group and individual threats".

The participants' attitudes related to "discrimination" in both studies were more positive than their attitudes associated with "realistic threats". Although the self-reported attitudes of the participants did not indicate discriminatory behaviors, the fact that the positive attitude was not observed in terms of the perception of realistic threats prevents a conclusion that the attitudes towards Syrians were generally positive. Participants did not report blatant discrimination on items when social codes were clear (discrimination factor). However, they tended to favor the ingroup on items when social codes were not as clear (realistic threats factor). Further research is required to investigate whether attitudes of university students towards Syrians is expressed in the framework of subtle discrimination (Dovidio, Gaertner ve Pearson, 2016).

In conclusion, the findings of this study indicated that working on perceived realistic threats might contribute to reducing prejudice and discrimination against Syrians. The extent to which university students' emphasis on equality-based values is related to subtle discrimination should be investigated in further studies. The "Attitudes towards Syrians Scale", which proved to be a reliable and valid instrument can be utilized in the subsequent studies to measure the prejudice and discrimination against Syrians in Turkey.