

Perceptions of Social Support and Future Expectations among Young Adult Syrian Immigrants

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Abstract

This study discuss the perceived social support, future expectations and the problems experienced before, during, and after forced immigration by young and adult Syrian immigrants who arrived in Turkey to seek temporary protection status due to the civil conflicts. The study was designed as qualitative inquiry and was implemented by applying the semi structured questionnaire with ten people through the face to face interviews. In terms of result of the study, it was determined that leaved their education before immigration, losed of family members, forced to leave their country, psychological problems during the immigration and had some problems like financial difficulties, adaptation problem, unemployment, feeling alienated, language problems after the immigration. It was observed that syrian young immigrants don't see Turkish public and the services given Syrian under the temporary protection as a social support mechanism however the open door policy applied by Turkey is a sufficient for them. Young Syrian immigrants see their Syrian acquaintances and relatives as a social support system and they mostly state that they have positive thoughts about future due to religious and cultural values.

Keywords: Immigration, Syrian, social support, future expectations.

Introduction

Immigration is a phenomenon that existed throughout the history of humanity for various reasons and it is still a phenomenon that affects change and transformation of the existing structures and builds new structures. Even though the effect of international immigration has increased considerably with globalisation, immigration as a phenomenon has a history well predating the age of globalisation (Giddens and Sutton, 2014). Immigration has many incentives such as economy, politics, education, and war but it may also be a result of consequences related to religion and ethnicity. Immigration because of war, in other words, forced migration of people under mandatory conditions; bring many drastic economic, psychological, and social problems. According to AFAD data (2015), more than 1.7 million Syrians immigrated to Turkey following the civil conflict in the year 2011 in order to seek international protection under the 'temporary protection statuses.

According to ORSAM data (2015), as of November 2014, official numbers point at around 1,645,000 Syrian immigrants living in Turkey whereas unofficial figures assert more than 2 million immigrants, most of which (85%) living outside camps. In March 2015, United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees declared that Turkey has become the country hosting the highest number of refugees in the world and also at the end of 2016; it was declared by AFAD that the number of Syrians living in Turkey is nearly 3 billion.

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Being forced to break from their country, their family members, and their social environment, experiencing a process of forced immigration, and efforts to know and adapt to a new culture are factors that inevitably affect the Syrian immigrants' conceptions of social support and future expectations. Syrian immigrants who strive to find a place in Turkey after the forced migration have to cope with multiple psycho-social, economic, political, and cultural problems. Syrian individuals who primarily face problems in meeting their basic needs such as accommodation, health, and education cannot make use of the employment opportunities and domestic resources as much as the citizens of the country due to language barriers, cultural differences, and social prejudices and they may suffer from stress, anxiety, and depression (Measham et al, 2014). Since they are in a phase of growing up, immigration may act in a more coercive way on young people compared to adults. Young immigrants face various obstacles such as recognition in the host country, racism, admission to peer groups, and language barrier (Cooke, 2008; Tanyas, 2012).

According to Mcwhirter & Mcwhirter (2008), stunning developments in the world distorts the mental balance of the youths and they force the young people to rethink, solve problems, and establishing a balance. Future conceptions of the young people who left their countries due to forced immigration are shaped under these negative circumstances. Various studies show that a positive perception for the future, particularly among young people from minorities and low-income groups is connected to social and emotional progress (Werner & Smith, 1982). Accordingly, in the process of the young immigrants' adaptation to the Turkish society, their perceptions of future expectations shall be discussed on their specific statuses of utilising opportunities of education, accommodation, health and employment, their family conditions, residence permits, access to services, and experiencing discrimination. This study will discuss the problems experienced before, during, and after forced immigration by the young Syrians who arrived in Turkey due to forced immigration and will assess their perceptions of social support and future expectations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors shaping the future expectations of the young Syrians under temporary protection and to assess their future expectations. To reach this goal, this study will seek answers to the following questions:

1. What are the young Syrians' problems experienced before, during, and after forced immigration?
2. What are the factors affecting the young Syrian immigrants' conceptions of social support and future expectations?
3. What kind of future expectations and social support systems do the young Syrian immigrants have?

Importance of the Study

It is considered that this study identifying the social life adaptations, future expectations of the Syrian immigrants that arrived in Turkey by influxes with importance on global scale and their experiences in these processes may assist the future studies and provide information support in policies to be developed and bears significance in this context.

Limitations

Factors such as language, translation were effective in limiting the number of the people included in the sample group. Since Syrians are concerned for revealing of their identities due to security reasons, safe and authoritative personalities that provided help to Syrian families/youths before the foundation staff in Önder neighborhood came in charge were approached for assistance. Accordingly, this study was conducted with individuals referred by the authoritative personality. Although this study was planned in the qualitative research pattern and concluded accordingly, after the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior decision stipulating the precondition of permission for research concerning Syrians, the research was turned into a semi-research format.

Methodology

Study Group

While the sample group of the study was designated, the Önder neighborhood of Ankara, place of a dense Syrian settlement was chosen and the young Syrians living in the neighborhood was contacted through an employee at the Önder Foundation of Science and Social Service, himself also a Syrian immigrant.

This person provided assistance in reaching out to the young Syrian immigrants who may be included in the study and other participants were contacted on his referral. This mode of collecting the study data required using the snowball method.

Collection and Analysis of Data

Data from the study were collected by use of a questionnaire based on semi-structured demographic data, as well as detailed interviews and observations targeting identification of the participants' conceptions of social support and their future expectations. Questionnaire was translated to Arabic and retranslation into Turkish by an expert of the Arabic language assured linguistic uniformity. A preliminary trial was implemented by applying the questionnaire to five young Syrians that arrived in Turkey due to forced migration and who are not in the study group. The questionnaire was given its final form based on feedbacks. In order to have the participants express themselves more comfortably at interviews, a Syrian student proficient in the Turkish language was present as an interpreter. Prior to interview, the participants were informed of the study's content, purpose and the destined mode and context of utilisation of the data and their consent was taken. During interviews, the responses given by the participants in their own language were translated into Turkish by the interpreter and recorded on tape. At the analysis stage subsequent to transcription of the tape recordings, Maxqda11 application was used. Key themes were identified from the data obtained at the interview and coded. More comprehensive themes of higher level were created based on the relations between the themes.

Observations and Conclusion

Observations on socio-demographic aspects

It was observed that young and adult Syrian immigrants were forced to end their education primarily to the war. On the other hand, young immigrants who want to continue their education are barred from this prospect mainly due to language barriers and, additionally for males, their necessity to work. Young immigrants who are university graduates and with professional training cannot be employed because they do not have work permits and due to language barriers. It was observed that most of the young Syrian immigrants are married with children. They stay at a single house in multiple families and their monthly income is not sufficient to meet their needs. Since the families are fed mainly by able males who can work, it is observed that they have a very low possibility of continuing their education. It was asserted that Syrians are employed clandestinely, dismissals are frequent, wages are lowered, and there are serious economic concerns.

Observations on concerns before, during, and after migration

In order to assess the young Syrian adult immigrants' status in Turkey, it is great significance to consider primarily their conditions in Syria during the war, the immigration they experienced due to war, and their conditions after migration. It was observed that young Syrian adult immigrants' assert that their socio-economic conditions in pre-war Syria was good, they continued their education, those with training were employed in their professions, and were content with their lives and this situation was seriously damaged due to the war. A great range of stress factors are active during the war. The chaotic environment that prevents life activities, destruction of schools and workplaces, loss of relatives and friends, threat to life have made the young adult Syrians meet the trauma of war and, leaving their country individually or with their families, they became a part of this influx en masse. Young immigrants who have higher economic level immigrated to Turkey as tourists and the ones who have low economic level moved to Turkey by taking refuge across the border. During the process, the open door policy applied by Turkey and its hospitable approach, as well as better conditions compared to other countries receiving immigrants and Turkey's proximity on the border made Turkey a preferred destination for Syrian immigrants.

It was detected that feedback from contacted relatives that immigrated earlier to countries receiving Syrian immigrants plays a major role for Syrian emigrants' preferences for destination. Although they experienced many serious problems concerning social adaptation, their cultural and religious similarities with Turkey facilitated the process of adaptation. Loss of their family members and economic losses in their country of origin and particularly their forced migration and settling in another country as 'aliens' affected the young immigrants in a considerably negative sense. Their experiences prior to emigration, i.e. during the war, still have an impact on their daily lives and result in concerns for their children.

In their current lives, when they hear the sound of an aeroplane or hear a sudden and loud sound, they remember what they lived during the war and the nervous behaviour associated with experiences in the war are observed more frequently among children. It was seen that the most significant effect of the civil war on the people is the prominent sense of distrust and concern. This was described by the young Syrians as the result of ambiguity of the source of any possible threat. According to this, Syrian youth are not only living the threat of Syrian troops but also they are living with the threat of İŞİD.

Observations on conditions in Turkey

Young Syrians describe the Turkish society's approach and attitude towards Syrians under two views: There is a group that does not see them as foreigners, does not marginalise them, and treats them in a friendly and helpful manner and yet, there is another group that has a negative attitude towards Syrians and argues that Syrians, by living on government aid, extort the employment and social welfare opportunities that are needed drastically by many Turks. According to a study by Hacettepe University (2014), 60.2% of the public maintains the opinion that aids to Syrians are not approvable while many people in the country live under conditions requiring such aids. Considering the argument that they seize the job opportunities, young Syrians tell that Turks have a legitimate concern. They declare that many Turkish entrepreneurs employ Syrians with lower wages and without any registration and they dismiss their Turkish employees. Some of the Syrian immigrants told that, considering their accommodation, they encounter negativities such as discriminatory behaviour from landlords and they may be evacuated from their houses by diverse reasons and due to complaints from their neighbours. Syrian immigrants living as beggars in Turkish cities and unfavourable news of the Turkish media on Syrians may lead to Turkish prejudices and overgeneralisations towards Syrian immigrants.

Young Syrians declared that they are not supported by the Turkish state in economic, informative, and psychological matters. They tell that they are economically supported by the Turkish people and some foundations. They asserted that the Turkish government is able to provide aid only to immigrants staying at camps and since the living conditions are negative, they chose to leave the camps and they are receiving no monetary aid either. Young Syrians told that they have firm cultural convictions and they believe that males who are able to work should work and look after their families instead of waiting to receive aid. They asserted that, even though the Turkish government provides no economic support, their acceptance as refugees to the country has a very important meaning to them. Notwithstanding the stress, anxiety, fear, and distrust due to war and some negativity they experienced during migration, most of the young Syrian adults told that they are happy to be in Turkey and the milieu of peace and tranquillity they have in Turkey has a priority for them as well as their families.

Observations on social support conceptions and future expectations

Immigration process results in transformation and weakening of family dynamics and social relationships in various contexts. It is reported that immigration leads to disintegration, recession or qualitative changes in social support networks (Hovey, 2000; Aronowitz, 1984). Social supports the immigrant groups have, social attitudes developed towards them in host countries, expectations from their new lives are all effective factors for development of new survival strategies in a new culture (Ünal and Demir, 2009). Both forced migration and the process of adaptation to the host society and culture have a considerable impact on the young immigrants' conceptions of future expectations and social support. Especially, in the process of coping with intense changes and adaptation to a new culture, the young immigrants' need for social support becomes even more prominent.

At interviews aimed at identification of the Syrian immigrants' social support system in Turkey, it is found that, when they encounter problems and they are in need of any informative support, Syrian immigrants usually consult their relatives or acquaintances that migrated to Turkey earlier and if they have no relatives or acquaintances in Turkey, they ask for help from their immigrant neighbours or their Turkish neighbours.

Even though there is a hospitable attitude towards Syrian immigrants in Turkey, there are also conceptions that they are a burden to Turkey. Language barriers, reactionary attitudes towards cultural differences, and the conception that they seize the job opportunities contribute in barriers in communication and increase of negative conceptions against Syrian immigrants. Aids are considered as negative particularly by low-income groups and lead to criticism of an unjust distribution in welfare. In the process of adapting to the culture, lack of language skills constitute an obstacle before young immigrants to build social support networks. Furthermore, compact settlement of Syrian immigrants in certain areas may be considered as another factor that makes social adaptation difficult.

At interviews with young adult immigrants, it was observed that the hard process of war and immigration and the struggle for a new life caused a sense of despair and doubt for the future. Some Syrian immigrants told that they take refuge in Allah and pray when they are in need of help. According to Brune et al. (2002), some studies reveal that among the immigrants' mechanisms of coping with hardships are limited cognitive and faith systems. Additionally, according to Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2003), attitude of patience and praise may be conceived as a precursor of a 'better future' earned as an award through pain and thus associated with religious beliefs. As a part of the religious belief, the hardships endured are seen as a sort of 'testing'. Accordingly, even though the immigrants claim that they feel themselves more furious, anxious, and unhappy after their experiences of war and immigration, it can be argued that they are not completely desperate for the future and relate this stance with their religious beliefs. Young Syrian immigrants in general hold the hope of an end to war and returning to their country. On the other hand, some young immigrants claim that no peaceful environment shall be established even after the war and internal strife will continue and they do not consider returning to their country. Furthermore, it is observed that they have concerns of future expulsions from the country in case of a regime change. While young adult Syrians espouse a relatively positive view of the future, young Syrians seem to be more desperate and pessimistic. Particularly their deprivation of education rights leads to a significant concern for their future. Therefore, future expectations of young adult Syrian immigrants mainly concentrate on issues of a better living for their children and access to education opportunities.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Young Syrians living in Turkey primarily have a problem of language and this problem becomes a precursor of incidental problems. Language barrier prevents the young immigrants from continuing their education, their social adaptation and satisfying their tasks in the life cycle. Marginalised position in the society particularly has a negative impact on all commitments and plans of the young Syrians for the future and bars them from self-realisation. There are expectations that the Turkish state should increase material aids to ease economic troubles, create job opportunities, lower rents, enable access to education and health services and it may be argued accordingly that the level of meeting such expectations has been rather low. In this context, it is observed that provision of professional support services for young adult immigrants has been insufficient.

We can say that most of the Syrians are children and young adults. Access of this young population to fundamental services and their education are topics that shall be of primary concern. An inclusive and comprehensive adaptation plan to meet the Syrians' needs is vitally required. In this context, teaching of the Turkish language that is of critical importance in the process of assuring adaptation of the Syrians on cultural, economic, and social platforms and young Syrians' utilisation of education programmes are of great importance. Consequently, a planning for language education for these young people who are currently in temporary refugee status should be made as soon as feasible and their educational rights should be provided. For immigrants experiencing problems of information, a centre that shall serve the immigrants with interpreters should be founded and the immigrants should be informed of this centre through information networks. Since Syrians are currently under temporary refugee status seeking international protection in Turkey, all countries concerned should provide the necessary support and contribute in this process. In order to assure adaptation of the young adult Syrians to Turkey, to prevent their victimisation, and to mitigate negative thoughts and prejudices against Syrians, comprehensive and transformative policies should be developed.

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