

## THE MIGRATION REASONS AND EXPERIENCES OF SYRIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

### SURİYELİ ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN GÖÇ NEDENLERİ VE DENEYİMLERİ: NİTEL BİR ÇALIŞMA

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**ÖZ:** Bu çalışmada Suriye'deki savaştan sonra Türkiye'ye gelen Suriyeli üniversite öğrencilerinin göç nedenleri ve göç esnasındaki deneyimlerini incelemek amaçlanmıştır. Bu amaçla Suriye'deki savaşı deneyimleyen 11 gönüllü Suriyeli üniversite öğrencisi araştırmaya katılmıştır. Verilerin analizi için yorumlayıcı fenomenolojik analiz kullanılmıştır. Analiz sonuçlarına göre göç nedenleri ve deneyimleri olmak üzere iki tema ortaya çıkmıştır. Göçün başlıca nedenleri fiziksel ve psikolojik şiddet, politik baskı, taciz, tecavüz, dolandırıcılık ve sevdiklerinin kaybıdır. Katılımcıların göç sürecindeki olumsuz deneyimleri onların Türkiye'deki hayatını etkilemiştir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Göç nedenleri ve deneyimleri, Suriyeli üniversite öğrencileri, Nitel araştırma.

**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of this research is to examine in detail the migration reasons and experiences of Syrian university students. For the purpose of the research, the experience of the war in Syria and coming to Turkey in various ways and participating in a voluntary way research is conducted interviews with 11 Syrian university student. Interpretative phenomenological analysis of the data obtained in the research was made. According to the results of the analysis, two themes called reasons and experiences of migration emerged. The main reasons for migration are physical and psychological violence, political pressure, harassment, rape, fraud and death of loved ones. Negative experiences of the participants during the migration has affected her life in Turkey.

**Keywords:** Migration reasons and experiences, Syrian university students, Qualitative study.

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## GENİŞ ÖZET

### Giriş

Bu çalışmada Suriye'deki savaştan sonra Türkiye'ye gelen Suriyeli üniversite öğrencilerinin göç nedenleri ve deneyimlerini incelemek amaçlanmıştır. Suriyeli üniversite öğrencilerinin göç nedenleri ile deneyimleri benzerlik gösterirken, bu bireylerin ihtiyaçlarının ve beklentilerinin neler olduğu da anlaşılmaya çalışılmıştır.

### Yöntem

Bu çalışmada Suriyeli üniversite öğrencilerinin göç nedenleri ve deneyimlerini ayrıntılı olarak anlamak için nitel araştırma desenlerinden olgubilim (fenomenoloji) yaklaşımı kullanılmıştır. Fenomenoloji yaklaşımı kendi içerisinde birden fazla analizi barındırır. Bu araştırmanın verileri Yorumlayıcı Fenomenolojik Analiz (YFA) yöntemi ile analiz edilmiştir. YFA yöntemi, katılımcıların dünyasını anlamının yanı sıra, onların deneyimlerini nasıl anlamlandırdığına odaklanmaktadır. YFA yöntemine dayanarak ilk görüşmeden itibaren araştırmanın amacına uygun olarak notlar alınmıştır. Bu notlar aracılığıyla kodlar oluşturulmuştur. Bütün görüşmelerden elde edilen kodlar ortak bir tema altında toplanmıştır ve araştırmanın amacına uygun olarak iki tema ortaya çıkmıştır. YFA sayesinde araştırmacı araştırma sonuçlarını tartışırken sıklıkla katılımcı görüşlerine yer verir ve kendi yorumlarına sık sık yer verir. Bu çalışmada da katılımcı görüşlerine dayanarak araştırmacı kendi yorumlarına yer vermiştir.

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Suriye'deki savaşı farklı zamanlarda, farklı şekilde ve sürede deneyimleyen zorunlu göçmenler dahil edilerek zengin veri elde etmek için maksimum çeşitlilik örnekleme ve katılımcılara "Bu konuda bilgi sahibi olan başka Suriyeli göçmen var mı?" sorusundan yola çıkarak daha fazla katılımcıya ulaşmak için kartopu örnekleme kullanılmıştır. Araştırmada 6'sı kadın, 5'i erkek olmak üzere toplam 11 Suriyeli üniversite öğrencisi ile görüşme yapılmıştır. Veriler araştırmacı tarafından yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşme formu ile toplanmıştır. Görüşmelerin süresi ortalama 56 dakika sürmüştür. Elde edilen veriler bilgisayara aktarılmıştır ve veriler manuel bir şekilde analiz edilmiştir. Veri analizi için göçmenler konusunda araştırmalar yürüten bir araştırmacı tarafından veriler manuel olarak analiz edilmiştir. İki araştırmacının analizleri karşılaştırılmıştır. İki araştırmacı birbirini ikna etme sürecine girmiştir ve nihai sonuçlar elde edilmiştir. Elde edilen bulguların doğruluğunu kontrol etmek için araştırmacı, katılımcılara bulgularla ilgili açık uçlu sorular yönelmiştir.

Araştırmacı katılımcı teyidi olarak bulguların geçerliğini arttırmaya çalışmıştır. Benzer şekilde veri toplama, veri analizi, sonuçları rapor edip yorumlama süreçlerinin aşamalarını detaylı bir şekilde açıklayarak dış güvenilirliği sağlamaya çalışmıştır. İç güvenilirlik için araştırmanın verileri göç konusunda çalışan bir araştırmacı tarafından daha analiz edilmiştir. Veriler toplanmadan önce katılımcılara gönüllü katılım formu imzalatılmıştır. Bu formda görüşmenin yaklaşık süresi, katılımcının istediği soruya cevap vermeme hakkı olduğu, araştırmadan istediği zaman ayrılacağı ve herhangi bir sorumluluk altına girmeyecekleri belirtilmiştir. Araştırmacı yaptığı araştırmanın sonuçlarının topluma etkisinin gözetilmesi açısından etik davranmıştır.

### **Bulgular**

Yukarıda bahsedildiği gibi yorumlayıcı fenomenolojik analizin doğasına uygun şekilde her bir katılımcı ifadesinden yola çıkarak kodlar oluşturulmuştur. Yorumlayıcı fenomenolojik analizine dayanarak ilk görüşmeciden itibaren veriler analiz edilmeye başlanmıştır. İlk görüşmeciden itibaren kodlar oluşturulmuştur. Araştırmanın amacına uygun olarak bazı kodlar değiştirilmiş, bazı kodlar araştırmadan çıkartılmıştır. Bu kodlardan yola çıkarak ortak temalar oluşturulmuştur. Bu şekilde yorumlayıcı fenomenolojik analizi süreci tamamlanmıştır. Yapılan analizler sonucunda Suriyeli üniversite öğrencilerinin göç esnasındaki yaşantıları iki tema altında toplanmıştır. Bu temalar "göç nedenleri" ve "göç deneyimleri" olarak adlandırılmıştır. Göç nedenleri çevresel faktörler, psikolojik sağlık ve eğitim olmak üzere üç alt temaya ayrılmıştır. Başlıca çevresel faktörler bireyin yaşamış olduğu can ve mal kaybı, savaştan sonraki dışlanma, psikolojik ve dini baskı, Suriye'deki siyasi atmosfer ve ailesinin göç etme kararıdır. Bunların yanı sıra katılımcıların başta travma ve kaygı olmak üzere yaşadıkları psikolojik sağlık problemleri ve eğitim öğretim sürecinin aksaması katılımcıların diğer göç etme nedenleridir. Katılımcıların göç sürecindeki deneyimlerinin başında, belirsizlikten dolayı yaşamış oldukları kaygı yer almaktadır. Nerede kalacakları, dışlanma korkusu ve eğitimlerine devam edip etmeyeceklerinin belirsiz oluşu onları kaygılandırmaktadır. Ayrıca göç ederken karşılaştıkları olumsuzlukları bilememe, Türkiye'ye güvenli bir şekilde girip girememe de onların kaygılanmasına neden olmaktadır. Katılımcılar çeşitli olumlu ve olumsuz yaşantılar deneyimlemişlerdir. Katılımcıların olumsuz yaşantıları göç sürecinde şiddete, tacize ve istismara maruz kalmalarıdır. Olumlu yaşantıların başında ise sınırda Türkiyeli askerlerinin katılımcılara iyi davranması gelmektedir. Bir yandan katılımcıların yaşadıkları olumsuz olaylar onları gelecek için endişelendirse de, diğer yandan göç sürecindeki olumlu yaşantılar ileriye yönelik kaygılarını azaltmıştır.

### **Sonuç ve Öneriler**

Bu araştırmanın bulguları Suriyeli üniversite öğrencilerinin göç esnasındaki yaşantılarını detaylı bir şekilde ortaya koymuş ve bilinmezlikle dolu olan göç yolculuğu hakkında ayrıntılı bilgi vermiştir. Katılımcıların tamamının gelecekle ilgili hedefleri yarıda kalmıştır. Türkiye'ye geliş sürecinde ev sahibi halk tarafından dışlanmadıkları için şanslı hissetmekte ve minnettarlık duymaktadırlar. Onlar kendilerine yapılan iyiliğin karşılığını vermek istemektedir. Araştırmanın önemli sonuçlarından birisi hem erkek hem de kadın katılımcıların kimilerinin göç esnasında taciz, şiddet, dolandırılma, istismar v.b. olumsuz yaşantıları deneyimlemiş olmalarıdır. Bu sonuçlar ışığında bundan sonraki araştırmalara birkaç öneride bulunulabilir. Suriyeli üniversite öğrencileri psikolojik sağlığı açısından eğitim-öğretim sürecine hazır olmadan üniversitelerde eğitim almaya başlamıştır. Bu bireylerin psikolojik sağlığına yönelik adımların atılması önemlidir. Benzer şekilde savaştan dolayı sevdiklerini kaybeden bu bireyler Suriye'yi ve oradaki sevdiklerini özlemekte ve Türkiye'ye uyum konusunda ciddi sorunlar yaşamaktadır. Bu yüzden bu bireyler eğitim öğretim sürecine hazır hale getirildikten sonra üniversiteye uyum kapsamında çeşitli oryantasyon çalışmaları geliştirilebilir. Öte yandan bu bireylerin Türkiye'deki farklı kültürlere ve sosyal

hayata uyum sağlaması için akranları ile bir arada olabilecekleri faaliyetlerin organize edilmesi de onların hem uyum sağlamasına hem de ruh sağlığına ve sosyal gelişimine katkı sağlayacağı düşünülmektedir.

## INTRODUCTION

Immigration, which affects the cultural, political, economic structure and psychological health of the society, has been the subject of many studies. People prefer places where their living conditions are better and where they can live more safely as a migration zone (United Nations, 1948). Especially after wars, people migrate to places where they can feel safe or are forced to migrate. Many people experience psychological health problems both during and after wars (Abou-Saleh & Hughes, 2015; Jefee-Bahloul, Barkil-Oteo, Pless-Mulloli & Fouad, 2015). Lama, François, Marvan and Sami (2016) stated that after the war in their country, the number of bipolar, depressive disorder and anxiety cases increased among Syrians. One of the consequences of wars and migration is trauma. As a result of the conflicts in Libya, people's psychological health has been seriously damaged and post-traumatic stress disorder and depression rates have increased (Charlson et al., 2012). The World Mental Health Federation (2013) drew attention to the deterioration in people's psychological health as a result of the war in Syria. Therefore, access to psychological health services for the victims of war in Syria is of great importance.

Theoretically, migration focuses on the psychology of "intercultural" encounters in culture learning theory (Masgoret & Ward, 2006). If immigrants do not know the beliefs and values of the society they emigrated to, they will have sociocultural adaptation problems (Kurman & Ronen-Eilon, 2004). On the other hand, speaking the language of the dominant culture increases adaptation (Clément, Noels & Deneault, 2001). According to the attachment theory regarding immigrants, immigrants who are securely admitted accept the negative emotions of migration. Those who are insecure may have prejudicial biases (Van Eecke, 2005). According to Parham's (1989) ethnic identity theory, immigrants who are resistant to ethnic identity exchange experience more adaptation problems. The theory emphasizes that immigrants do not have to abide by the identity of the host people (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 1999). This situation may cause the individual to be marginalized. As immigrants rethink and research their ethnic identity, they look for a place in this cycle (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). This affects the adaptation process. Bhugra (2004) emphasizes the individual's experiences during migration in the theory of migration and psychological health. Physiological and psychological health of the individual during migration is effective in making sense of migration. According to the model, immigrants who experience risk factors such as loss, mourning, trauma are more likely to experience problems in adapting to the new culture and psychological health problems in the post-migration period.

Considering the psychological literature on immigrants in Turkey, researchers focused on post-migration (Boynuegri, 2018; Inac, 2018; Kavak, 2017; Ozturk, 2019). It has not been seen any studies examining the experiences of migrants in Turkey during migration. Similarly, studies abroad have focused on post-migration experiences of immigrants (Fazel, 2018; James, Iyer & Webb, 2019; Li & Anderson, 2016; Li, Liddell & Nickerson, 2016; Sangalang et al., 2019). The experiences during migration have been subject the post-migration studies. Immigrants have difficulties during migration. In this ambiguous journey, some immigrants die and some experience traumatic things during migration (Kaya, 2019; Zwi & Alvares-Castillo, 2003). Female immigrants are exposed to abuse, rape, physical and emotional violence more than men, both during and post-migration (Adanu & Johnson, 2009). Therefore, migrants of war encounter experiences that negatively affect psychological health. Examining the migrants' experiences during migration can help identify their needs and reduce possible risk factors in their lives. For this purpose, in this study, the question "How are the reasons and experiences of Syrian university students?" has been investigated.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The purpose of this research is to examine in detail the migration reasons and experiences of Syrian university students. In this study, the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which is one of the qualitative research patterns, has been used while examining the experiences of Syrian university students during migration. Phenomenology tries to understand what is under a phenomenon or life experience (Patton, 2002). This section includes research design, study group, data collection tools, data collection process, data analysis, validity and reliability, the role of the researcher and ethics.

## **Sample**

To obtain a rich data set in qualitative research, more than one sampling method can be used simultaneously (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Patton (1987) suggests maximum diversity sampling to reveal the importance of common themes related to different experiences about a case. This study has aimed to obtain rich data by including immigrants who experienced the war in Syria at different times, and in different ways, and for this purpose, maximum diversity sampling was used. The researcher determined some criteria while deciding to the maximum diversity sampling. The first criterion is that the participants experience the war in Syria. The second criterion is that they live in Turkey at least three years. Finally, being a university student was determined as a criterion. These criteria may cause some limitations. For example; experiences of newcomers to Turkey may be different. This was ignored. Conducting this study with only university students as a criterion caused the experiences of other individuals not to be examined. This may limit the group to which the results can be generalized. The other sampling method preferred in this study is snowball sampling. As Patton (1987) has suggested, the question "Who can give information about this issue?" was asked to reach a richer source of information and snowball sampling was used.

In phenomenology studies, the sample size can vary between 10-25 (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2016) also states that in qualitative research, the sample size is related to the saturation of the data. The data collection process is ended when the desired data is reached in accordance with the purpose of the research. Interviews were made with 11 Syrian students studying in different undergraduate programs at a public university. 6 of the participants are women and 5 of them are men. The ages of the participants are between 22-26.

## **Research Instrument and Procedure**

A literature review has been carried out for the purpose of the research and an interview form was created. In this form is questions about the experiences of the participants after the beginning of the migration process. A subject matter expert working on Syrians examined the form. After the expert opinion, the form was revised, some questions were removed from the form. Besides the language validity of the form was checked by a faculty member working in the Turkish Education department and it was prepared for the pilot scheme.

Syrian university students at the institution where the researcher worked wanted to receive psychological counseling. The researcher has placed advertisements in some parts of the institution to carry out this research with the permission of the director of the institution. Participants were reached by stating the purpose of the research in this announcement. Therefore, all of the participants voluntarily participated in the study. A volunteer participation form was prepared by the researcher. In this form, it was stated that the identity information of the participants would not be shared with anyone, the participants had the right to leave the study at any time and the data would not be used in any way other than the purpose of the study. The researcher read volunteer participation form to the participants and wanted asked to sign this form. First of all, the pilot implementation was carried out with two Syrian university students. After the meeting, the questions were revised and the form was finalized. The interviews were held in the psychological counseling center of the university where the researcher worked. The interviews were recorded on the voice recorder for later transcription. The shortest interview took 45 minutes and the longest interview 63 minutes. Voice recordings were transcribed on the computer. Then, each participant was given a nickname (F1, M1 etc.).

## **Data Analysis**

IPA method was used to interpret the data of this study. This method is a subjective, inductive and questioning approach (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). IPA was done in four stages. First of all, the researcher repeatedly read the data set of the first participant. In the second stage, the repetitive codes are written to the right of the paper. In the third stage, the connections between the codes are examined and themes are created. Data obtained with other expert researchers were reviewed. Unsuitable codes were removed from the research. This process was also applied to the transcripts of other participants. At the last stage, themes were created by cross-comparison method. Also, according to Bazeley and Jackson (2013), the researcher should make the data transcript. The researcher made the data transcript and analysis on his own to master the data. Codes were created based on literary readings and a word or sentence in the data set. The coding of the data was done manually and the resulting codes were written next to the data. During the analysis process, expert opinion was consulted and the codes were corrected.

Some codes have been removed, some codes have been combined, thereby creating themes. Themes emerging as a result of content analysis are interpreted in the “Findings” section.

### Validity and Reliability

There are multiple methods to test validity in qualitative research, and Cresswell (2017) proposes to use at least two of them. To increase the validity, the researcher reported and explained how he collected the data and reached the results. The researcher reunited with the participants to determine the validity of the findings obtained in this study. The researcher asked the participants several open-ended questions about the findings to check the accuracy of the findings. The researcher tried to increase the validity of the findings by receiving participant confirmation. Similarly, the researcher tried to provide external reliability by explaining in detail what he did about the process of data collection, data analysis, reporting and interpreting the results. For internal reliability, Kuckartz (2014) stated that coding the data independently by more than one person will add credibility and diligence to the research. The data of this research was analyzed by another researcher working on migration. Two researchers came together to work on different codes to determine the codes and the researchers tried to convince each other. Besides, in the findings section of this research, it was tried to increase credibility and therefore reliability by giving information about the features of the participants as well as their statements.

### Role of The Researcher and Ethics

Before we talk about the role of the researcher, it is necessary to talk about why the researcher works on this subject. The Syrian university students in the institution where the researcher worked applied to the psychological counseling unit for psychological support. Some of the reasons for getting help are exclusion, loneliness, adaptation problem, longing for the past and not being able to get rid of the impact of war. The participants also stated that they could not escape the effects of the trauma experienced while entering to Turkey. Therefore, the researcher focused on this subject and conducted interviews with the psychological counselor ID as well as the researcher ID. If the participants wanted, the researcher said he would provide psychological support.

## FINDINGS

The purpose of this research is to examine in detail the migration reasons and experiences of Syrian university students. The two themes obtained as a result of the IPA were called migration reasons and migration experiences. Some participant statements about these themes are given below. There are three sub-themes on the migration reasons to Turkey. These sub-themes are environmental factors, psychological health problems, and education. They are given in Table 1.

Table 1.  
*The sub-themes on the migration reasons to Turkey*

| Sub-themes                    | F  |
|-------------------------------|----|
| Environmental factors         | 11 |
| Psychological health problems | 9  |
| Education                     | 4  |

It is understood that environmental factors, psychological health problems and education are effective in the migration decision of the participants. The main factors in the decision of migration are the decisions taken by the individual's family, loss of property and life, war conditions, exclusion, psychological and religious pressure, the destruction of schools and the political atmosphere in Syria. Some of the statements that migration reasons are given below.

#### ***Environmental factors***

“If I stayed there, I would have to go to the army and kill someone. I was very scared. I chose to come here” (M5).

“I came because my family wanted it. The war drove us here. My homeland is Syria” (F1).

“We were excluded because we were Muslims after the war. We had to leave where we were born” (F5).

Forced to join the army is a cause for concern for migrants. Political and social pressure has been one of the main reasons for their migration. One of the environmental factors that influence migrants' decision to migrate is family. Although they did not want to emigrate, they left Syria because their families wanted them. In other words, Their family's decisions determined their future. Another environmental factor that causes migration is the exclusion of immigrants due to their religious beliefs. Undoubtedly, religious beliefs are part of individuals' identities. They had to migrate in order not to be

excluded. As a result, immigrants left their homeland due to the negative effects of the environment. This situation is detrimental to their psychological health.

### ***Psychological Health Problems***

The war caused not only the participants' financial loss but also psychological health problems. So they had to migrate.

"I witnessed that they killed my brother. I'm not the old me. My psychology will never be as good as before" (M1).

"I could not sleep because a bomb would fall and we would die at any moment. My psychology turned upside down" (F3).

"I was having a panic attack. I did not sleep. I was very afraid that one of my family would die" (F4).

"Well, my psychological health was so bad that I was shot dead in my dream every night. In my dream, I was seeing torture on my family" (M2).

As it is also understood from the statements, individuals whose psychological health was negatively affected had to migrate. They came to Turkey to flee from the circumstances in their homeland. All negative experiences of individuals have caused them to experience various psychological problems. The main psychological problems for them are panic attacks, intense fear, pessimism, death anxiety, nightmares and sleep disorders. Undoubtedly, witnessing someone's death will leave deep marks in an individual's life. Especially, witnessing the death of a family member is a traumatic experience for the individual. These people may have lost hope or may be pessimistic about the future. Therefore, the death of their relatives and other negative experiences has paved the way for the individuals to migrate.

### ***Education***

Another reason for migration is that the education in Syria is suspended. The idea of staying away from school, demolition of schools, not getting any education there and reaching their dreams abroad caused the migration of the participants. Regarding this, the opinions of the participants are below.

"My biggest dream was to be an entrepreneur. I couldn't fulfill my dream in the war environment. Now I'm talking to companies here. I'm very glad that I came" (M3).

"I did not go to school for a while because my house is too far from the school. Then I learned that the school was bombed. I could have died too. Human life is not important there. I couldn't stay there anymore. I came here" (F2).

As it is understood from the statements of the participants, they could not continue their education due to the war. But they did not give up and continued to fight. They decided to migrate to achieve their dreams and to build a better future for themselves and came to Turkey. In addition to realizing that they will not be able to go to school again, immigrant youth realized that they are momentarily facing death in Syria. Both the prevention of the right to education and the death anxiety of immigrants forced them to migrate.

The second theme obtained in this research is migration experiences. The experiences in the migration process are effective for the participants to make sense of the current situation. There are three sub-themes on the migration experiences. These sub-themes are concerns, negative experiences, and positive experiences. They are given in Table 2. Findings related to travel experiences are given in Table 2.

Table 2.  
*The sub-themes related to migration experiences*

| Sub-themes           | F  |
|----------------------|----|
| Concerns             | 11 |
| Negative experiences | 7  |
| Positive experiences | 2  |

Participants emigrated to Turkey because they think that Turkey is a safe country. During post-migration process, as well as they felt anxiety and lived with positive and negative experiences. Below are the opinions of the participants regarding these situations.

### ***Concerns***

Migrants worry because they have a fear of exclusion, they do not know where to stay and whether to continue education. The negative events they experienced further worried them. It is not difficult to predict these concerns.

"I did not know a single word Turkish. I was so scared. Hard to tell. It worried me to think that nobody would hire someone who does not speak their language" (M5).

“I went out with a backpack. Nothing was clear. I was very worried. If anything happened, I wouldn't even be able to tell my family” (M1).

“Turkey is a safe country, but I was afraid to tell the Turks that I am a Syrian citizen lest they would exclude me” (F5).

Uncertainty is a condition that causes anxiety in people. Migration is a journey with an uncertain end. Immigrants who did not know what to experience on this journey experienced intense anxiety. This anxiety increases when the language in which people can express themselves is insufficient. Not speaking Turkish is a serious concern for them. On the other hand, as in Syria the exclusion of migrants in Turkey in terms of religion, identity, and nation increases the likelihood of their concerns. All these worries can be considered as an obstacle for them to start a new life.

### *Negative experiences*

Participants had negative experiences in the migration process, some of which are harassment, fraud, exclusion, and loneliness.

“I had no relatives in Syria. Everyone was dead. Alone I'm seeking refuge in Turkey. My wallet was stolen on the journey. I was already anxious. Here I started to think that I can't trust anyone” (M4).

“I was harassed at the border. I hope nobody lives that kind of thing. But I know some people experience worse things than I do” (F2).

The negative experiences by the forced migrants during the migration frightened them. In addition to fear, negative experiences hurt their sense of trust and they fell into pessimism. In addition to the moral losses, their financial losses increased their concerns. In addition being a woman means being more exposed to sexual abuse, rape and abuse than men. Therefore, being a woman can be considered a more disadvantageous situation in the migration process. However, The women are grateful for the circumstances. Because they think other women immigrants could have more negative experiences.

### *Positive experiences*

Participants' forward concerns have decreased thanks to positive experiences in the migration process. The good welcome at the border, the feeling of trust given by Turkish troops, safe roads, and Turkey's open-door policy for Syrians were perceived positively by the Syrians.

“I was harassed in Syria I did not want to see any men. I did not establish eye contact with anyone. At the border Turks behaved us well. Then I believed more that I would not be excluded” (F4).

After the war in Syria, the participants were afraid of being excluded in Turkey; however, they did not want to go back to Syria. Immigrants were not excluded in Turkey and The people who lived in Turkey well behaved to the immigrants. They feel lucky and grateful that they are not excluded. On the other hand, the positive experiences of the participants can be a source of motivation for them to reach their goals. In addition, the positive experiences of immigrants will make them more hopeful for the future. As a result of this, it can be thought that immigrants will adapt more easily and quickly.

## **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

In this section, the reasons for migration and experiences of Syrian university students are discussed in detail in order of the findings. First of all, environmental factors are the leading causes of migration. While family is at the head of these environmental factors, politics can also be effective. Apart from that, religious minority / majority and intergroup conflicts can be effective. It is known that external pressure increased after the war. Also, it is known that external factors such as violence and sexual harassment cause immigration (Bucheli, Fobtenla & Waddell, 2019; Sarkar et al., 2008; Shrestha, 2017;). Especially the regime's sectarian discrimination policy prepares the ground for exclusion and conflict (Baltes, 2016). Considering the results of this study, individuals were affected by environmental factors. Participants had to migrate to live in better conditions. Similarly, young and talented doctors working in the health sector have migrated because they were working in increasingly difficult conditions in Syria (Abbara et al., 2015). In a study conducted in Eritrea, people were unable to find the freedoms they sought in their countries, struggled with violence against them and had to leave their countries (Tronvoll, 2009). These results support the findings of this research. Recent studies show that although environmental factors are different, the result of these factors is forced migration.

Psychological health problems have emerged as another important factor in the migration of the participants. As a natural consequence of these problems, their psychological health has deteriorated. According to the migrants, psychological health deterioration means exclusion, fear, anxiety, exposure to violence, depression and stress. It is possible to encounter similar results in the literature. In addition to the death of hundreds of thousands of people, war exerts physical, political and psychological violence on

the individual and negatively affects the psychological health of the individual and causes people to migrate (De Juan & Bank, 2015; Elsafti et al., 2016; Heisbourg, 2015). Feinstein and Starr (2015) stated that the psychological well-being of Syrian journalists was negatively affected by the news of violence on the internet. Connel (2012) states that Eritrean government's psychological violence against the people caused people to migrate. Many psychiatric disorders and adjustment problems, especially depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, are encountered in migrant individuals (McCrone et al., 2005). After these developments, people were displaced (Karell, 2017). In the light of the above studies, it is understood that the psychological health problems that cause migration are similar. In addition, it can be said that these problems are also effective in individuals' post-migration lives. Therefore, the efforts to improve the current psychological health of migrants can be increased, since the participants in this study stated that although they had been living in Turkey for five years, they were still under the influence of traumatic events in Syria. Therefore, this study is important in determining the psychological needs of immigrants.

As stated in the findings section, the last reason immigrants migrate in this study is the disruption of the education process. According to the immigrants, disruption in the education process means that their schools are bombed, their dreams are destroyed and they can no longer go to school. Current research supports the findings of this research. The blow to education by war is undoubtedly enormous. Throughout the war in Syria, higher education level students were targeted more and terrorist attacks were organized against this group (Bradford & Wilson, 2013). Higher education institutions have been the primary targets of terrorist attacks (Milton, 2019) and education has become a crisis (Kamyab, 2017). In the first place, approximately one million school-age students migrated to neighboring countries due to the war (Dallal, 2016). This situation has caused hundreds of thousands of students to be deprived of one of their fundamental rights. According to the data of the World Bank (2008), Syria was the country where the basic education was best given before the war. However, conflicts brought education to the suspension point in the country (Seydi, 2013), which negatively affected the career plans of the students in education age. So much so that the first major attack on universities happened in January 2013 and 87 people died (MESA, 2013). They did not want to leave illegally with refugee status in Syria, and therefore they were stuck with bureaucratic obstacles to complete their undergraduate studies and not have equivalence problems. In light of this information, it is thought that the disruption of career plans of university age youth and the negative impact of psychological health may cause them to migrate. Unfortunately the majority of these individuals do not receive training in Turkey for several reasons. Thanks to the educational opportunities to be offered to these individuals, they can benefit the society. Another remarkable study was done after the civil war in Liberia. Equipment and supplies from the Medical School were stolen and the buildings were badly damaged. Most of the healthcare professionals, university lecturers, and hospital and medical school administrators fled the country (Challoner & Forget, 2011). It is understood that a great damage occurred in terms of both technical infrastructure and educated people in the country after migration.

Migration has resulted in various experiences for immigrants. According to the findings obtained from the research, their concerns are at the top of the migration experiences of the participants. Migration brings risks and uncertainties with it. These risks and uncertainties cause anxiety (Williams & Baláž, 2012). Sam and Berry (1995) name intense stress and anxiety among the most common problems in new migrant children and adolescents. In line with this result, Kashyap, Page and Joscelyne (2019) stated that depression and post-traumatic stress disorder are common in migrant survivors. Not knowing the language and culture of the country of destination causes anxiety and academic failure in the person, as well as causing identity confusion, depression and anxiety disorders (Smith & Maurer, 2000). Uncertainty also diminishes immigrants' hope (Hernandez-Carreero, 2017). Immigrants who cannot stand this uncertainty sometimes have to migrate back (Delpierre & Verheyden, 2014). Similarly, the participants of this study stated that they had thought of returning to Syria many times due to uncertainties. However, they decided to stay in Turkey because conditions in Syria are worse.

Little is known about the experience of forced migrants during migration. No matter where in the world, any forced migration journey is not easy. Immigrants encounter many negative experiences during migration. Participants of this study also stated that they encountered various adverse experiences during migration. Similar findings are seen in different studies. In line with the results of this research, Van Raisen, Estefanos and Rijken (2012) stated that the refugees from Sudan were defrauded by human traffickers to enter another country. Lijnders (2012) stated that forced migrants who emigrated from Eritrea to Israel were taken hostage by human traffickers, tortured and extorted, raped and their organs were removed. Nakash et al. (2015) stated that immigrants from Eritrea and Sudan were subject to

beatings, threats of death, electroshock and rape during immigration to Israel. In another study examining the negative experiences during migration, it was stated that Tibetan refugees were sexually assaulted and tortured by the Nepalese Maoists while emigrating to Nepal (Dolma, Singh, Lohfeld, Orbinski & Mills, 2006). Migrants' experiences during migration affect their lives after the migration (Nakash, Wiesent-Brandtsma, Reist & Nagar, 2013). The results of the aforementioned studies are similar to the results of this research. As expressed by the participants in this study, the uncertainty about their future, the means of immigration, harassment, torture and death during migration affect the lives and psychological health of immigrants in Turkey negatively. Social and psychological support is required to reduce the negative experiences of the participants in this difficult journey without any guarantee. It is clear from what the participants mentioned.

Immigrants do not encounter only negative experiences during migration. Some of their positive migration experiences make them forget the reasons for migration and increase their adaptation. One of the results from this research is that positive migration experiences increase social cohesion. In a study with similar conclusions, positive experiences with officials in Germany caused immigrants to feel psychologically well and increase their integration (Doğan, 2020). A positive relationship has been found between positive migration experiences, such as social and economic support, and the integration of immigrants (Kveder & Flahaux, 2013). In another study, Ward and Styles (2003) stated that forced migrants who had positive psychological and social experiences after immigration adapted faster, their sense of belonging increased and they built a new identity. In this study, the prospect of improving themselves by getting a good education is the most distinctive feature that distinguishes the university students from the others. Continuing university education may facilitate adaptation. It is thought that the study group of this research, are a special and advantageous group compared to other Syrians. These individuals are more likely to realize their expectations and are more fortunate than other Syrians. Meeting the needs of university students can speed up their development and adaptation. Thanks to the opportunities provided to Syrian university students, they feel better than they did during the migration process.

To summarize, taking steps towards the expectations of migrants will prepare migrants better for the future. Apart from the opportunities offered to immigrants, perhaps the needs of immigrants should be determined. Thus, the source of the problems can be identified. In parallel with this explanation, it is thought that academic studies about what war immigrants experience while migrating are not sufficient. This research is important in terms of examining migrants' experiences that affect their present moment by focusing on migration process rather than the process before/after migration. On the other hand, this research has some limitations. Participants had a hard time explaining their traumatic experiences to someone they never knew. Instead of creating therapy groups, a more therapeutic environment can be created. In this way, participants can express themselves more easily. Experimental studies involving Turkish peers will fill an important gap in the literature. As mentioned before, the most important problem faced by immigrants during migration is trauma. Therefore, psychological health professionals should take an active role in both academic studies and practice. Thus, the future expectations of immigrants can be understood and the adaptation process will accelerate.

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