

# RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES, DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES, AND PREJUDICE TOWARD SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY: LOCAL DATA AND INTERNATIONAL DIFFERENCES

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## **Abstract**

Prejudice against people of ethnic groups different than one's own can be central to intergroup conflict. A person's religiousness may function to either facilitate or retard prejudices, depending upon whether the way the religion is held fosters perceiving others as outsiders and in an "us versus them" manner. These considerations raise concerns about increased expression by

Republic of Turkey citizens of attitudes against the Syrian refugees that fled to Turkey between 2011 and 2019. The present study used quantitative methods to examine prejudice against Syrian war refugees and asylum seekers as related to religious attitudes and demographic variables in 400 Turkish Muslims in rural Eastern Anatolia, making this a unique dataset that adds to the international pool of information about religion and prejudice. Analyses of measures of social distance from others, feelings toward the outgroup, and religious attitudes showed that prejudice decreased as religious attitudes became more positive, and that women's religious attitudes were more positive than those of men. Participants with lower monthly income had significantly higher religious attitudes and lower social distance scores than those with high income. People studying Engineering, Education, and Arts and Science showed greater prejudice than those studying Theology. The findings help expand our knowledge base of the relation between religion and prejudice, and document differences between the present findings and those of studies of this relationship in other countries and religions.

**Keywords:** Prejudice, Religiosity, Religious Attitudes, Social Distance, Syrian, Refugees, Islamic Attitudes.

## **DİNİ TUTUM, DEMOGRAFİK DEĞİŞKENLER VE TÜRKİYE'DEKİ SURIYELİ MÜLTECİLERE YÖNELİK ÖNYARGI: YEREL VERİLER VE ULUSLARARASI FARKLILIKLAR**

### **Özet**

Etnik gruplardan insanlara karşı olan önyargı kişinin kendisinin gruplar arası çatışmada merkezde bulunabilmesinden farklıdır. Bir kişinin dindarlığı, dinin “biz ve onlar” şeklinde başkalarını yabancı olarak algılamayı teşvik edip etmediğine bağlı olarak önyargıların ortaya çıkmasını kolaylaştırabilir ya da

yavaşlatabilir. Bu hususlar, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti vatandaşlarının 2011-2019 yılları arasında Türkiye'ye göçen Suriyelilere yönelik tutumlarda daha fazla ifade edilmesi konusunda endişeler uyandırmaktadır. Bu araştırmada, Doğu Anadolu'da 400 Türk-Müslüman'ın dini tutumu ve demografik değişkenlerle ilişkili olarak Suriyeli mülteci ve sığınmacılara yönelik önyargılı tutumlarını incelemek için nicel yöntem kullanılmıştır. Böylelikle, din ve önyargı konusunda uluslararası bilgi havuzuna özgün bir veri seti eklenmiştir. Öteki ile sosyal mesafe, dış gruba yönelik duygular ve dini tutum konusundaki analizler, dini tutumların daha olumlu hale gelmesiyle önyargının azaldığını ve kadınların dini tutumlarının erkeklerden daha olumlu olduğunu göstermiştir. Aylık geliri daha düşük olan katılımcılar, yüksek gelire sahip olanlara göre önemli ölçüde daha yüksek dini tutumlara ve daha düşük sosyal mesafe puanlarına sahiptir. Mühendislik, Eğitim ve Fen-Edebiyat fakültesinde okuyan insanlar, İlahiyat okuyanlardan daha fazla önyargı göstermiştir. Bulgular, din ve önyargı arasındaki ilişkiye dair bilgi tabanımızı genişletmeye yardımcı olmakta ve mevcut bulgular ile diğer ülkelerde ve dinlerde bu ilişkiyle ilgili çalışmaların bulguları arasındaki farklılıkları ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ön yargı, Dindarlık, Dini Tutumlar, Sosyal Mesafe, Suriyeliler, Mülteciler, İslami Tutumlar.

### **Introduction**

The civil war that began in Syria in 2011 directed millions of people into other countries in a wave of forced migration – a decade-long phenomenon that turned into a mass movement (Aksit, Bozok & Bozok, 2015). According to the UNHCR (2019), 68.5 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide by the end of 2018, 40 million were internally displaced, 25.4 million were refugees, and 3.1 million were asylum seekers. During this period, Turkey received more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees of all ages. Because of this, it is important to assess whether Turks have

prejudicial attitudes towards the Syrians. In addition, because the vast majority of the Syrians are Muslims and Turkey also has a majority Muslim population, it is valuable to assess whether any prejudicial attitudes the Turks might have are related to their own religiousness. The goal of the present study was threefold: (1) to examine of local attitudes of Turks toward Syrians, (2) to add to the international knowledge of the relationship between religion and prejudice as manifest in a unique, understudied sample (3) to explore the degree to which the theoretical understanding of the relationships between religiousness and prejudice extrapolate sufficiently well to validly apply to that relationship in the present study, or perhaps in Turkey more generally, or whether some alternative theoretical conceptualization is necessary.

### **Context**

Universities can attract people from different countries and host people of different colors and cultural identities. These differences may play a role in strengthening intercultural communication and understanding, but may also have the reverse effect if the outgroup enters a host country too quickly. The massive influx of immigrants in Turkey between 2011 and 2019 may have caused Turkish university students to adopt prejudicial attitudes towards those with different identities. Specifically, the sudden and large migration of Syrian war refugees may have brought about a psychosocial problem in which cultural differences are less accepted, tolerance decreased, and desired distance from *the other* increased. A number of prejudiced statements toward Syrian refugees have recently been stated by Turkish students: E.g., “They flee from war here and settle in universities without exams, take shelter in state dormitories free of charge and receive our scholarship.” A significant portion of these expressions may be related to lack of knowledge of the individual target of the communication and the lack of adequate contact between the two cultural groups. Thus the existence of social distance between

groups may not only be caused by prejudicial attitudes, but also can be transformed into discriminatory behaviors such as insults, scorn, and exclusion. This circumstance then sets the stage for the marginalization of the mass of Syrian refugees and the feeling that they are second-class.

Importantly, in addition to the present study examining prejudicial attitudes of Turks towards Syrians, it assessed the relationship between prejudice and religious attitudes in one predominantly Muslim population toward others also of a predominantly Muslim population. It follows upon a long series of international research that documents a non-uniform relationship between religiousness and prejudice in the US (Allport, 1954; Allport & Ross, 1967; Batson, Schoenrade & Ventis, 1993; Donahue, 1985; Donahue & Nielsen, 2005), and that has been extended to Eastern Europe (Poland: Socha, 1999) and the Middle East (Iran: Ghorbani & Watson, 2006; Ghorbani, Watson & Mirhasani, 2007). In general, religiousness may facilitate or retard prejudice, depending on other factors and even if religious differences are minimal (Yapıcı, 2004; Donahue & Nielsen, 2005; Kite & Whitley, 2016).

In a study of 97 Muslim refugees in Turkey, Çetin (2019) found that religious participation had a negative relationship with prejudice and a positive relationship with social inclusion. In a study with similar results, Ben-Nun Bloom et al. (2019) found that religious attitudes towards Jewish (in-group) and non-Jewish (out-group) immigrants in Jerusalem affected whether they were more tolerant. The results showed that an individual's religious identity was associated with a more tolerant attitude towards the in-group, compared to the out-group. Contrary to these data, Deslandes and Anderson (2019) examined 43 studies in their meta-analysis of the relationship between religiousness and prejudice. The two most important conclusions were that what is meant by “religion” is “religiously affiliated” and not religiosity; thus, it tends to be

religiously affiliated samples that have negative attitudes towards refugees and immigrants, so that they are more likely than others to be the targets of prejudice. Another study (Cowling & Anderson, 2019) examined both Muslims and Christians for the degree of association between religiousness and prejudice towards asylum seekers in Malaysia. The most important result showed that there was greater prejudice towards refugees from a religion different from one's own – more negative attitudes toward the out-group member. Finally, a study of people in the general population in the USA found that Agreeableness was negatively related to prejudice toward Syrian refugees, Extroversion and Conscientiousness were positively associated with prejudice, and religious orientation added slightly to those relationships (Carlson et al., 2019).

Research on the populations noted above is important as both a contribution to the international scientific literature and as a useful source of information for making sound policy decisions that affect the lives of the citizens of a host country, refugees in that country, and other migrants. The present study is intended to contribute to the establishment of social policies that inhibit verbal and physical attacks against others, made manifest by prejudices.

### **Uniqueness of the Present Research**

The number of psychological studies of people who have been seeking asylum in Turkey is small, and there are fewer studies of Syrian war refugees. Thus, the present research begins to fill a gap in the international psychological research literature on the relationships between religiousness and prejudice. Although the issue of prejudicial attitudes of Turkish people towards Syrian asylum seekers has attracted some public attention, the studies are few. Özkeçeci (2017) examined prejudice towards asylum seekers by means of a questionnaire administered to 310 people living in Istanbul and Sanliurfa. She found that as the quality of contact increased, positive feelings increased. At the same time, perception

of realistic and symbolic threats, negative stereotypes, negative affect towards the outgroup, and perception of social distance decreased. Yanbolluoğlu (2018), on the other hand, examined the attitudes of 303 Turkish citizens towards Syrian asylum seekers and various factors that may explain them. The results indicated that positive contact with Syrian refugees was associated with the Turk's positive feelings toward them, and negative contact was associated with increased negative feelings toward them. A decade before the Syrian war, Bikmen (1999) studied the attitudes and stereotypes of Turks towards different ethnic groups and found that social contact with people in specific groups may decrease as contact with all ethnic groups' increases. Bikmen also observed that a negative bias toward an out group decreased as its socioeconomic status increased. Thus, in addition to a group's ethnic identity, its social class is also a determinant of prejudice. Erişen (2018) proposes that social distance is an important factor that increases prejudice and negative feelings towards Syrians – a notion that may parallel research findings on similar phenomena in international research on prejudice.

Not all of the studies focus on bias against Syrians (e.g., Bikmen, 1999), but those few that do focus on prejudice towards Syrians have all been carried out in highly populated provinces such as Sanliurfa, Istanbul, and Bursa. However, there may be differences in the cultural identities and their attitudes towards Syrian refugees and those of people in the more rural Turkish provinces. Therefore, there is a need for parallel research in the more rural areas (Özkeçeci, 2017; Yanbolluoğlu, 2018) in Turkey and internationally. The present study aimed to help fill this void by being conducted in the province Elazig, Eastern Anatolia, and thus provide a unique contribution. One important datum that makes the present study valuable is that it is first to explore prejudice toward and social distance from Syrians living in a rural Turkish province, which hosts more Syrian war refugees than the total number in Poland, Denmark, Norway, and Portugal – a not small

slice of Western Europe. Extending this point, the present study examines the relationship between prejudice and religious attitudes in particular, in a predominantly Islamic cultural context for both the host and immigrant peoples.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

A set of variables may be at work in the participants' lives that would theoretically facilitate both compassion and harmony between the host and migrant groups as well as tension between them. They are similar in that both groups are comprised of students, they attend the same university in the same location, are from two countries of predominantly the same religion, and are generally at equivalent economic levels. They are also equivalent in gender. These factors would seem to foster a sense of equality, hospitality, and equanimity in the host group. However, an opposing set of processes may instead foster suspicion, competition, or conflict between the groups. The host group may feel like the immigrant group is trying to take what does not belong to them (e.g., jobs, healthcare resources, housing, money, educational opportunities) and may be tired of the immigrants needing and asking for help. Because of this, any compassion the host group initially felt for the immigrants may have dissipated, become stale, and tainted with negative feelings such as resentment.

The prejudicial attitudes as manifest in a desire to keep a larger social distance from the immigrants might not be assessed in an unconfounded or nonreactive way by asking participants directly if they are prejudiced. But they are more likely to be assessed in two less direct, more nonreactive ways, by asking them a set of questions that tap the desired social distance between the two groups, and by asking them indicate on a "thermometer" how they felt about the immigrant group. These two instruments, as well as the measure of religious attitudes, are presented below.



### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The main question of this study is: “*What is the relationship between prejudice toward Syrian immigrants and religious attitudes in Turkish students in Eastern Anatolia?*” Based on this basic question, the research also seeks to illuminate the relationship between prejudiced attitudes and various demographic variables (gender, income level, field of education). The research hypotheses were:

*H<sub>1</sub>. There is an overall relationship between prejudice and religious attitudes. This overall relationship is evident as follows.*

- a. There is a posture of social distance by Turkish students toward Syrian students, especially manifest in those participants whose field of education does not connote stronger religiousness.
- b. There is an inverse relationship between religious attitudes and social distance.
- c. There is a positive relationship between religious attitudes and feelings (cold-warm) of the Turkish students toward the Syrian students.

*H<sub>2</sub>. Turkish students have negative (cold) feelings towards Syrian students to a degree greater than would be expected based on their self-reported initial feelings toward them.*

- a. These feelings are related to religious attitudes and various demographic variables (gender, income level, field of education).

### **Method**

#### ***Participants***

A set of 425 questionnaires was initially distributed to potential research participants. Of these, 25 were incomplete or incorrectly filled out and, therefore, deleted from the study. This left a final sample of 400 undergraduate students at Firat

University, Elazığ, Turkey, who participated in the study between February and May 2019.

Multi-stage cluster sampling was used to generate the sample, with an N = 100 in each of the following fields of study: Engineering, Theology, Arts and Sciences, and Education. There were 200 men and 200 women. Their mean age was 22.1 years, with 7 aged 18 (categorized as adolescents), 386 between 19-30 (young adults), and 7 between 31-38 (middle adults). The places from which they came as primary residences were as follows: from a small village of population size less than 2000, N = 66 (16.5%); from a town of size between 2000-20.000, N = 8 (2%); from a district of size more than 5000, N = 68 (17%); from a province of size more than 20.000, N = 176 (44%); from a big city of size more than 750.000, N = 82 (20.5%). When asked whether or not they lived in a multicultural environment, 46% (184) said “yes” and 54% (N = 216) said “no”. Ninety percent (N = 360) were employed when participating in the study; 10% (N = 40) were not. Their monthly income levels (in Turkish Lira [TL]) were 1-999 (N = 35), 1000-1999 (N = 94), 2000-2999 (N = 103), 3000-3999 (N = 81), 4000-4999 (N = 40), and 5000+ (N = 47).

### **Questionnaire**

**Demographic information.** The questionnaire consisted of 4 parts. The first part asked for demographic information and consisted of 10 questions that asked the participants for their age, gender, field of education, where they lived most of their life, whether where they lived was multicultural, their attitude upon their first encounter with a foreign person (i.e. a person from another country with a different ethnic identity), income level, and marital status.

**Bogardus Social Distance Scale.** The Social Distance scale developed by Bogardus (1925) to measure national and racist attitudes consists of 7 items. It was adapted into Turkish by Balaban (2013) as a 6-item measure. Balaban found Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha, an index of internal consistency, to be .93. The Cronbach

Alpha for the dataset in the present study value was .83, thus reflects high reliability and useful for research. The participants rated each item from 1 (never disturbed) to 7 (very uncomfortable). The set of items ask about one's boss being a Syrian, working with a Syrian, living on the same street with a Syrian, having a Syrian neighbor, or a Syrian close friend, or being married to a Syrian. In this 6-item version of the scale, the total score that corresponds to the lowest possible social distance is 6, and the total score that corresponds to the highest possible social distance is 42. A lower score reflects little or no discomfort, whereas a higher score reflects a greater discomfort and bias toward keeping one's distance from the other.

**Feeling Thermometer.** The feeling thermometer scale (Esses, Haddock & Zanna, 1993) adapted to Turkish by Balaban (2013) assesses prejudicial attitudes as a measure of the participant's emotional state as analogous to a temperature. It is a single-item scale for which selecting 0 "degrees" indicates very cold (negative) feelings and 100 degrees represents very warm (positive) feelings. Warmer (higher) scores correspond to lower prejudice. In the present study, this measure was adapted as the "Feeling Thermometer" for use with the Syrian students as the target population. It asked participants to indicate their feeling toward members of the immigrant group from very low to very high, by placing a mark on a diagram of a thermometer with "0" (low) at the bottom and "100" (high) at the top, with instructions that indicate that "100" is more favorable.

**The Ok Religious Attitude Scale.** This scale (Ok, 2011 for the Turkish version, 2016 for the English version) assesses religious attitudes in an Islamic context by means of 8 items broken down into 4 categories of 2 items each. Half of the items were negatively worded in order to control for response-set bias. Sample positively worded items are, "I check that I am living my life in line with my

religious values” and “I feel that God helps me when life is difficult.” Sample reverse scored items are, “I feel there is no need for religion” and “I feel religion does more harm than good to people”. Participants are asked to rate their degree of agreement with each item on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale. Thus the range of possible scores goes from 8 (lower attitudes toward religion or a religion) to 40 (higher attitudes toward religion or a religion); a higher the score reflects more affirmation of religiousness. In two samples, of 934 and 388 people, Ok (2011) found the alpha coefficient to be .81 and .91. In the present research, it was .88.

### ***Procedure and Data Analyses***

All participants volunteered for the study. They were informed that they could cease participation at any time if they were uncomfortable with the questions, and informed about the general purpose of the research and who the researcher was before they filled out the questionnaire. The researcher was present at all times and answered any questions while the participants completed the questionnaire.

The survey was conducted in different locations within the campus. For example, at the beginning of lectures in classes, canteens, students in the garden were selected according to the criteria. It was given to him/her when they voluntarily agreed to complete the questionnaire. There was no time limit. Usually students complete within 15-20 minutes. It is conducted February-March 2019.

Data analyses were performed using the SPSS 22.0 statistical package. Independent samples t-tests were used to assess whether the differences between two groups was significant. Oneway ANOVAs were used to examine differences among the means of more than two groups. Scheffe tests and LSD tests were used to explore specific mean contrasts among the

groups. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to reflect the degree of relationship between two continuous variables.

## **Results**

### ***Initial Encounter***

In order to gain an accurate conceptualization of the relationship between key demographic variables, the participants' religious attitudes, and degree of prejudice toward asylum seekers and refugees, it helped to first examine the participants' attitudes toward a person of a different ethnic identity in context of the first encounter with them.

The distribution of attitudes toward a person of different ethnicity upon a first encounter with them is highly skewed in the positive direction. Fifty-three percent (N = 212) of the participants indicated that they had a positive attitude, 44% (N = 176) had a neutral attitude, and only 3% (N = 12) out of the 400 participants had a negative attitude upon first encounter with a person of different ethnicity. Whether the high frequency of positive attitudes was due to simple liking, or to compassion and caring for the well-being of the other as might be assumed upon encountering asylum seekers or refugees, is unclear. Nevertheless, these findings can be compared with the participants' attitudes toward the Syrian immigrants, presented below.

### ***Religious Attitudes and Prejudice: Overall Results***

The first question to be asked of the data is whether they show an overall pattern of religious attitudes being associated with prejudice measures. The findings are generally consistent with the hypotheses. As shown in Table 1, the two measures that are indicators of prejudice, social distance and feeling thermometer scores, are both moderately and significantly correlated with favorable religious attitudes such that more religiousness suggests both lower social distance and warmer feelings toward Syrian immigrants.

**Table 1.** Correlations and descriptive statistics for religious attitude, social distance, and feeling thermometer scores.

| Correlations        | Rel. Att. | Soc. Dist. | Feeling Th. |  |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|-------------|--|
| Religious Attitude  | ---       | -.21*      | .25*        |  |
| Social Distance     | -.21*     | ---        | -.66*       |  |
| Feeling Thermometer | .25*      | -.66*      | ---         |  |

  

| Descriptive Statistics | Mean  | Std. Dev. | Range | Alpha |
|------------------------|-------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Religious Attitude     | 32.62 | 7.67      | 1-5   | .88   |
| Social Distance        | 18.61 | 10.61     | 1-7   | .83   |
| Feeling Thermometer    | 5.34  | 2.60      | 0-10  | --    |

\*  $p < .001$

The mean scores shown in Table 1 indicate that the most comfortable social distance of the participants towards the Syrians is moderate. A more detailed observation appears when we examine desired social distance for specific actions. For example, the highest social distance score ( $M = 4.6$ , [1-7 scale]  $N = 159$ ) was indicated for the closest relationship (marrying a Syrian immigrant), and the second highest score ( $M = 3.78$  [1-7 scale],  $N = 101$ ) reflected dislike for having a Syrian as one's employer.

Feeling thermometer scores followed a curve that reflected wide spread of affect from cold to warm. Of the 400 participants, one-fourth ( $N = 102$ ) selected the exact midpoint (50 "degrees") between very cold (0) and very warm (100). But the distribution was not balanced. Of the remaining 298 participants, 187 selected a feeling toward Syrian immigrants between 0 and 40. At 10-degree intervals, the frequencies for selecting each interval range from 10 – 55. In contrast, the remaining 111 participants indicated their feelings by selecting each of the 10-degree intervals above the 50-

degree midpoint, with the frequencies of selecting each 10-degree interval ranging from 13 – 37. Overall, therefore, approximately one-fourth of the participants felt neutral about Syrian immigrants, and of the remaining three-fourths, approximately 63% felt relatively cold toward the immigrants, and only about 37% felt some degree of warmth toward them.

### **Demographic Variables, Prejudice, and Religious Attitudes**

**Gender.** It is a well-replicated finding within and across cultures that in general women score higher than men on religiousness by almost any measure (Beit-Hallahmi, 2003, 2014; Paloutzian, 2017). The present study extends the examination of gender differences in religiousness to a nontraditional, non-western cultural context. The present findings replicate the established international findings – the Turkish women had more positive religious attitudes than their male counterparts. They also had lower prejudice toward the Syrians as evident by their lower social distance scores and higher warmth expressed on the feeling thermometer (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Means and (standard deviations), and t-test results for the religious attitudes and prejudice measures, by gender.

| <u>Variable</u>     |        | <b>N</b> | <b>M</b> | <b>S</b> | <b>sd</b> | <b>t</b> | <b>p</b> |
|---------------------|--------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|
| Religious Attitude  | Female | 200      | 33,63    | 6,97     | 398       | 2,65     | ,008     |
|                     | Male   | 200      | 31,61    | 8,21     |           |          |          |
| Social Distance     | Female | 200      | 18,18    | 9,77     | 398       | ,80      | ,421     |
|                     | Male   | 200      | 19,04    | 11,40    |           |          |          |
| Feeling Thermometer | Female | 200      | 5,45     | 2,32     | 398       | ,78      | ,432     |
|                     | Male   | 200      | 5,24     | 2,86     |           |          |          |

Gender differences were slight, showing one significance. First, religious attitudes of the Turkish participants differ significantly by gender,  $t(398)=2.65$ ,  $p<.01$ . Religious attitudes of the women ( $M=33.63$ ) are higher than those of the men ( $M =31.61$ ). Second, social distance scores of Turkish participants toward Syrian

refugees do not differ significantly by gender,  $t(398) = .80, p > .05$ . The females' social distance scores ( $M = 18.18$ ) are lower than those of the males ( $M = 19.04$ ). Third, the Turkish participants' feeling thermometer scores toward Syrian refugees do not differ significantly by gender,  $t(398) = .78, p > .05$ . The thermometer scores females ( $M = 5.45$ ) differ only slightly from those of the males ( $M = 5.24$ ).

The prejudice status of the participants did not show a significant difference according to gender (see Table 2). Social distance scores of women ( $M = 18.18$ ) were slightly lower than those for men ( $M = 19.04$ ). Similarly, female participants had more positive feelings towards Syrians ( $M = 5.45$ ) than their male participants ( $M = 5.24$ ). In parallel, Balaban (2013) also found a slight and nonsignificant relationship between social distance and gender.

As shown in Table 2, the religiosity of the participants shows a significant difference according to gender. Females ( $M = 33.63$ ) had higher scores on the religiosity scale than males ( $M = 31.61$ ), consistent with the hypotheses of this study.

**Field of education.** The number of Syrian students in Turkey increased dramatically during the time of the Syrian war. For example, there were 4 Syrian students at Firat University in 2011, which increased to 717 in 2019. This increase, in context of the refugee and asylum seeker crisis and some informal evidence of possible anti-Syrian attitudes with the latter being modulated by their somewhat inverse association with religiousness, suggested that the field of education in which Turkish students were enrolled may be related to prejudice against Syrians. Specifically, a hypothesis was that students enrolled in academic disciplines associated with a religion (i.e., Theology) may show lower prejudice scores than students enrolled in other fields of study (i.e., Engineering, Education, and Arts and Science). Three analyses of variance were run on aspects of the data to explore this question. The results appear in Table 3.



**Table 3.** Means and (standard deviations), and analyses of variance of social distance, feeling thermometer, and religious attitude scores, by field of education.

| Variable            | Field of Education            |                               |                              |                               | F    | p    |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|------|------|
|                     | Engineering                   | Education                     | Theology                     | Arts/Science                  |      |      |
| Social Distance     | 19.93 <sub>a</sub><br>(10.42) | 19.35 <sub>a</sub><br>(11.00) | 14.42 <sub>b</sub><br>(8.65) | 20.75 <sub>a</sub><br>(10.61) | 7.57 | .000 |
| Feeling Thermometer | 5.04 <sub>a</sub><br>(2.62)   | 5.20 <sub>a</sub><br>(2.47)   | 6.41 <sub>b</sub><br>(2.47)  | 4.74 <sub>a</sub><br>(2.56)   | 8.36 | .000 |
| Religious Attitude  | 31.85 <sub>a</sub><br>(7.70)  | 31.10 <sub>a</sub><br>(8.46)  | 33.93 <sub>b</sub><br>(7.22) | 33.60 <sub>a</sub><br>(6.96)  | 3.21 | .023 |

*Note: Across rows, means with different subscripts are significantly different from each other at a level of  $p < .001$ . Means across rows with the same subscript are not significantly different from each other.*

The results show a clear pattern in which the scores on social distance, the feeling thermometer, and religious attitudes vary in a way that is consistent across the fields of education, and consistent with the above noted relationship between religious attitudes and prejudice. Examination of the means across the rows in the table indicates that all three dependent variables are statistically significant. Examination of the subscripts across each row indicates that the students enrolled Engineering, Education, and Arts and Science did not differ significantly from each other in their social distance, feeling thermometer, or religious attitude scores. In contrast, those in Theology had lower degrees of prejudice and more positive religious attitudes ( $p < .05$  by Scheffe tests) than the students in Engineering, Education, and Arts and Science.

**Income.** The question of whether individual wealth or income may predict prejudice has been examined in international research (Beit-Hallahmi, 2014). Because of this and because it is known that as a generality, income is inversely related to

religiousness it was worth exploring the degree to which the income of Turkish university students might be a factor related to their attitudes toward the Syrian immigrants. In order to address this question, the participants indicated the number of Turkish Lira (TL) in thousands per month that reflected their income. They could select one of the following 6 options: less than 0-1000, 1000-1999, 2000-2999, 3000-3999, 4000-4999, and 5000+. Analyses of variance were run across the six levels of income with social distance, feeling thermometer, and religious attitude scores as the dependent variables. The results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Means and (standard deviations), and analyses of variance of social distance, feeling thermometer, and religious attitude scores, by income in Turkish Lira per month.

| Variable            | Turkish Lira (in thousands/month) |                               |                               |                              |                              |                               | F    | p    |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|------|------|
|                     | 0-1                               | 1-2                           | 2-3                           | 3-4                          | 4-5                          | 5+                            |      |      |
| Social Distance     | 19.77 <sup>a</sup><br>(11.46)     | 17.91 <sup>a</sup><br>(10.20) | 17.70 <sup>a</sup><br>(10.43) | 18.24 <sup>a</sup><br>(9.50) | 16.75 <sup>a</sup><br>(9.51) | 23.34 <sup>b</sup><br>(12.84) | 2.48 | .031 |
| Feeling Thermometer | 5.51<br>(2.35)                    | 5.34<br>(2.45)                | 5.33<br>(2.83)                | 5.65<br>(2.57)               | 5.75<br>(2.16)               | 4.38<br>(2.80)                | 1.74 | .122 |
| Religious Attitude  | 34.57 <sup>a</sup><br>(6.85)      | 33.77 <sup>a</sup><br>(7.02)  | 33.13 <sup>a</sup><br>(7.55)  | 30.46 <sup>b</sup><br>(8.53) | 33.40 <sup>a</sup><br>(6.68) | 30.76 <sup>b</sup><br>(8.15)  | 2.94 | .013 |

*Note: Across rows, means with different subscripts are significantly different from each other at a level of  $p < .001$ . Means across rows with the same subscript are not significantly different from each other.*

The results again show a pattern in which the social distance, feeling thermometer, and religious attitude scores vary in a relatively consistent way that makes sense in light of other literature on the relationship between religiousness and income and prejudice. Examination of the means across the rows in Table 4 indicates that there are significant differences among the mean scores for social distance and religious attitudes, with higher income associated with lower religiousness and greater social

distance from Syrian immigrants. There is no significant difference, however, in the feeling thermometer scores across the six levels of income, although they vary nonsignificantly in the direction consistent with the pattern for income and social distance. Examination of the subscripts across each row indicates those income levels that are nonsignificantly different from each other and those that differ significantly from the others. Higher income was in general a contributor to predicting a somewhat prejudicial posture toward the Syrians, as well as lower religious attitudes, as assessed by Scheffe tests ( $p < .05$ ).

### **Discussion**

This is the first study to examine the relationship between religiousness and prejudice towards Syrian in university students in Turkey. It replaces some, and extends other, international research. Because of this, it contributes not only to its local concerns that pertain to the relations between and well-being of both Syrian immigrants and Turkish citizens, but also to research on the relation between religiousness and prejudice in the international psychological arena. The research can be used for both application and knowledge. That is, the present findings can be useful in making policy decisions locally, and can be compared to the results of parallel research conducted in the West and elsewhere. In addition, although some research exists on prejudice against Syrian refugees, the number is limited and the studies have an insufficient sample size (Özkeçeci, 2017; Yanbolloğlu, 2018). However, the large sample employed in the present research constitutes 1% of the total student body of the university from which they came, and therefore its results can be taken as considerably more reliable than those of the previous studies.

Past research documents both negative and positive relationships were between religiousness and prejudice. Hoge and Carroll (1973) argued that there is no relationship between religiousness and prejudice, but that that personality traits had a

stronger effect on prejudice. In a study conducted on Venezuelans, intrinsic religiosity had a negative relationship with prejudice, whereas extrinsic religiosity had a positive relationship with prejudice (Ponton & Gorsuch, 1988). A relationship between adolescent religious development and prejudice conducted in Germany (Streib & Klein, 2014) found that the German sample's prejudice against Muslims and Jews decreased as religious development increased. On the other hand, the relationship between religiousness and prejudice was studied in different cultures (Clobert, Saroglou & Hwang, 2015) and found that when the West and East Asia were compared, it seemed that the effect of religion on prejudice was different for religions. In some cases, the prejudicial attitudes of those who are religious and those who are not religious prejudice and those who are not religious are similar. A variation of this has been found in, for example, the research on the relationship between Christian church attendance and ethnic prejudice in which it was found that those who attend the church at a medium level had higher prejudice scores than those who either attended a great deal or those who attended very little (Gorsuch & Aleshire, 1974.) Gürses (2005), echoing the historic contributions of Allport (1954), highlighted that prejudice has a complex relation with religiosity. Allport and Ross (1967) came to three important conclusions on religion and prejudice. The first result is that those who regularly go to church are more biased than those who do not go. The second result is that the relationship between religiousness and prejudice is curvilinear. The third finding is that extrinsically religious people are more prejudiced than those who are intrinsically religious.

The present findings replicate certain findings from other countries. In particular, the result that women had higher religious attitude scores than men follows a pattern that has been found in the US (Beit-Hallahmi, 2014) for mostly Protestant participants, in Poland (Socia, 1999) for Catholics, the UK (Francis & Evans, 2001; Francis & Wilcox, 1998) for those of various denominations, and in

Iran (Ghorbani & Watson, 2006) for Muslims. The same results have been reported for Turkish samples by Cirhinlioğlu & Ok (2011) and Ayten and Sağır (2014).

When the relationship between religious attitude scores and age was examined, no significant difference was found. This result is in line with that of other studies (e.g., Çınar, 2017). This result makes sense in view of the age span of the present sample, as the participants were university students within a relatively uniform age span, which would make the question of possible age relationships moot.

A finding that higher income was associated lower religious attitudes echoes the statement by Koç (2010) that the relationship between religious life and socioeconomic level is not one-sided and unidimensional. Instead, he argued that the relationships between religiousness and social class and income have a more complex set of factors at their roots. The same result has emerged in this present research. Those with the least income had the most positive religious attitude scores.

Finally, it appears that measurements of the feelings Turks have for the Syrians is generally cool. The mean scores on the feeling thermometers in the present study were 5.34. This parallels Özkeçeci's (2017) finding that the average feeling thermometer score was not significantly different, at 4.67. The cold (negative) feelings towards Syrians is an unwanted common feature of these studies, but not unexpected given the current social climate of overall Turkish-Refugee relations.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitations of the present study are similar to those in many studies of this sort. The data are cross-sectional, not longitudinal. It is hoped that subsequent longitudinal research hypotheses that extend this research will be developed and tested. Also, this project concerned the relationship between Turkish students' religiosity and prejudice towards Syrian students. The

methods and results must be compared and integrated with the larger international body of literature on religion and prejudice. Only this can inform us about the degree to which the present results extrapolate and apply elsewhere, or are specific to only the local context.

### **Conclusions and Suggestions**

1. In today's world where migration is rapidly increasing, there is a need for academic studies on prejudicial attitudes and the relationships between these attitudes, religiousness, other forms of spirituality and worldviews, and the cultural and sub-cultural factors that foster prejudice, on the one hand, and equality and fairness, on the other.

2. In universities and other institutions within society, experts working within the scope of Spiritual Counseling and Guidance can take an active role in fostering the integration of diverse peoples.

3. In order to minimize the social distance between people in a host country and refugees, social activities could be organized under the theme of inclusion days.

4. Conferences should be given by experts in order to eliminate incorrect or incomplete information that leads to prejudice towards refugees. Similar procedures can be followed in other regions and countries in which other targets of prejudice are evident.

5. The language of the media, which plays a major role in the formation of prejudices, must be positive and without bias. Language in the mass media should strengthen the relations between diverse groups.

6. Social policies should be implemented that facilitate the integration of refugees and people of the host countries.

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