

Social Exclusion: A Study from Turkey

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Abstract

Social exclusion is a relative concept, in the sense that an individual can be socially excluded only in comparison with other members of a society; there is no "absolute" social exclusion, and an individual can be declared socially excluded only with respect to the society in which she/he is considered to be a member. The present study we aimed to assess: The existence and level of social exclusion and contributing factors among a group of Turkish University students who are enrolled to a public university which is located in the western. There were 293 students in our study group. We found statistically significant differences among male and female students in terms of material deprivation and obtaining social rights dimensions of the social exclusion scale. For both of these dimensions male students were more socially excluded than female students. Economic status found to be an important factor for social exclusion and students who described their economic status as poor were more socially excluded for all dimensions except cultural integration. Three dimensions of the social exclusion scale found to be more important among our study group and these were: material deprivation, social rights and social participation.

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1. Introduction

Social exclusion is a term first used in France and now in common usage across Europe and the United Kingdom. It is used across disciplines including education, sociology, psychology, politics and economics [1]. The philosopher Axel Honneth speaks of a "struggle for recognition", which he attempts to theorize through Hegel's philosophy. In this sense, to be socially excluded is to be deprived of social recognition and social value [2].

A person is said to be socially excluded if she/he is unable to "participate in the basic economic and social activities of the society in which she/he lives". In the European Commission's Program specification for "targeted socioeconomic research", social exclusion is described as "disintegration and fragmentation of social relations, and hence a loss of social cohesion". For individuals in particular groups, social exclusion represents a progressive process of marginalization, leading to economic deprivation and various forms of social and cultural disadvantage [3].

Social exclusion is a relative concept, in the sense that an individual can be socially excluded only in comparison with other members of a society; there is no "absolute" social exclusion, and an individual can be declared socially excluded only with respect to the society in which she/he is considered to be a member. An additional relative feature is that social exclusion depends on the extent to which an individual is able to associate and identify with others [4].

Social exclusion is a multi-dimensional phenomenon appearing economically, structurally and socio-culturally in life [5], [3], [6], [7], [8]. Commins (2004) [9] considered social exclusion under the four

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headings of exclusion: citizen integration, labor market, welfare benefits and family-society. Silver (1994) [1], on the other hand, dealt with the concept of social exclusion as having economic, social, political and cultural dimensions. Many researchers considered the concept of social exclusion under the four dimensions of impoverishment or exclusion from sufficient income and resources, exclusion from labor, exclusion from services, and social relationships [10].

During the past ten to twenty years, the concept of social exclusion has become increasingly popular. It involves five defining criteria: social exclusion is multidimensional; it is concerned with dynamic processes; it is relational as much as distributional; it focuses on collective resources (for example, local areas and communities rather than on the individual or household); and it directs attention to catastrophically ruptured links in a wider society [11]. Social exclusion is of increasing interest because it has gained a primary role in official documents, and in the political debate in Europe; more recently, in Australia, Canada and the United States. The concept of social exclusion has had an increasing impact on analysis of social disadvantage in Europe over the past couple of decades, and, in many instances, replaced the concept of poverty [12].

Numerous indicators have been used to measure social exclusion. One of the most comprehensive lists of social exclusion indicators is found in the British project “Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion” [13], where 50 different indicators are reported on an annual basis. However, most other studies focus on a narrower range of indicators. The interpersonal dimensions of exclusion, subjective feelings of social exclusion or loneliness, accumulation of welfare deprivation, and participation in the labor market are the most frequently used indicators.

In Turkey, at the beginning of the 1990s, more emphasis was put on the term social exclusion, while criticism mounted and grew louder against the mitigating issues of social justice merely to redistribute income, economic growth, and the alleviation of poverty [14]. There is a broad consensus in Turkey that although the most important reason for social exclusion is poverty, cultural, spatial, and political dimensions of social exclusion also exist. Several forms of discrimination may also be experienced due to insufficient citizenship rights, existing social prejudices, and improper or inadequate social services [15], [16].

In the present study we aimed to assess: The existence and level of social exclusion and contributing factors among a group of Turkish University students who are enrolled to a public university which is located in the western, most socio-economically developed part of the country.

2. Research Method

In this study we used the social exclusion scale developed by Jehoel-Gijsbers&Vrooman (2007; 2008), which has four dimensions; material deprivation (MD), obtaining social rights (SR), social participation (SP), and cultural integration (CI). The dimension of obtaining social rights has two separate sub-dimensions; the first, being able to benefit from public institutions and aid in terms of social rights (SR1), and the second, being able to benefit from a suitable house and a secure environment (SR2). In the social exclusion scale, higher scores mean higher levels of social exclusion. The adaptation of this scale into Turkish and the validation studies for the Turkish version of this scale were performed by Bayram et al., (2011, 2012) [17], [18] and Cronbach alpha values for the Turkish version of this scale were as follows: Material deprivation (Dimension I) 0.79; social rights: access to institutions and provisions (Dimension IIA) 0.82; social rights: access to adequate housing and safe environment (Dimension IIB) 0.80; social participation (Dimension III) 0.77; cultural/normative integration (Dimension IV) 0.67.

Students for the study group were selected on voluntary basis. A total of 425 students who were enrolled to econometrics and statistics courses for different grades were asked to participate to the study and 293 students gave their verbal consent. The participation rate was 68.9%. A questionnaire about socio-demographic characteristics and the social exclusion scale were filled out by the participants anonymously.

Data analyzed by using the SPSS program. Beside descriptive analyses, correlation, student t-test and variance analyses were performed.

3. Results and Analysis

The socio-demographic characteristics of the study group is shown in Table 1. Their ages were between 18-24 with a mean age of 20.9±1.6 years.

Variables	N	%
Gender		
Female	138	47.1
Male	155	52.9
Grade		
1.	63	21.5
2.	63	21.5

3.	89	30.4
4.	78	26.6
Economic Status		
Poor	14	4.8
Moderate	165	56.3
Good	114	38.9
Residential area before university study		
Village/ town	97	33.1
City	65	22.2
Big city	131	44.7
Do you feel yourself excluded from the society?		
Yes	72	24.5
No	221	75.5

Most of them (56.3%) mentioned their economic status as moderate and 49.8% were satisfied with their education. Those who perceived themselves as excluded from the society were 24.5%.

Correlations among different dimensions of the social exclusion scale are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlations among the dimensions of social exclusion scale

	Dimension I	Dimension IIA	Dimension IIB	Dimension III
Dimension IIA: Social rights	.513 **			
Dimension IIB: Social rights	.429 **	.518 **		
Dimension III: Social Participation	.239 **	.172 **	.212 **	
Dimension IV: Cultural Integration	.152 **	.127 **	.174 **	.064

** p< 0.01

Except social participation and cultural integration all of the dimensions of the social exclusion scale were correlated positively and significantly. Table 3 shows the t-test results for male and female students in terms of mean social exclusion scores

Table 3. Mean scores of male and female students for different dimensions of social exclusion scale

Dimensions	Female (n=138)	Male (n=155)	t	p
Dimension I: Material Deprivation	18.66±5.53	20.56±6.49	-2.681	.008
Dimension IIA: Social Rights	10.69±4.03	13.10±4.82	-4.668	.000
Dimension IIB: Social Rights	17.33±5.29	18.35±5.72	-1.570	.117
Dimension III: Social Participation	17.21±5.38	17.46±5.97	-.383	.702
Dimension IV: Cultural Integration	14.41±4.72	14.37±5.55	.065	.948

Mean scores for material deprivation and social rights II A (access to institutions and provisions) found to be higher among male students which means male students felt themselves more materially deprived and less accessible to institutions and provisions than female students. We did not find statistically significant differences among different grades or age groups in terms of social exclusion scores. Educational level of mothers or fathers and marital status of parents were also not to be significant on social exclusion scores.

Students who perceived their economic status as poor have had the highest mean social exclusion scores for all dimensions except cultural integration (Dimension IV). Table 4 shows the mean scores for all dimensions of social exclusion in terms of perceived economic status.

Table 4. Mean scores for all dimensions of social exclusion according to the economic status

Dimensions	Economic Status			F	p	Post Hoc *
	Poor (N=14)	Moderate (N=165)	Good (N=114)			
I: Material Deprivation	28.71±6.08	20.27±5.66	17.68±5.62	25.775	.000	1>2>3
IIA: Social Rights	15.79±5.04	12.18±4.55	11.19±4.44	6.817	.001	1>2=3
IIB: Social Rights	20.14±3.63	18.33±5.72	16.92±5.33	3.490	.032	1>3
III: Social Participation	20.71±3.36	17.67±5.93	16.46±5.38	4.205	.016	1>3

IV: Cultural Integration	15.79±4.99	14.36±5.42	14.26±4.81	.546	.580	-
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* Tukey; 1-Poor; 2-Moderate; 3-Good

Students who were living in villages or small towns before their higher education have had the highest mean scores for the material deprivation dimension of the social exclusion scale. And the difference among students came from villages/small towns and from big cities was statistically significant. Table 5 shows the mean scores for all dimensions of social exclusion in terms of former residential area.

Table 5. Mean scores for all dimensions of social exclusion according to the residential area

Dimensions	Former residential area			F	p	Post Hoc *
	Village/ town (N=97)	City (N=65)	Big city (N=131)			
I: Material Deprivation	20.84±6.41	20.37±5.90	18.45±5.83	4.903	.008	1>3
IIA: Social Rights	12.18±4.70	11.86±4.64	11.86±4.58	.148	.862	-
IIB: Social Rights	17.27±5.57	19.11±6.05	17.70±5.18	2.277	.104	-
III: Social Participation	17.99±5.82	17.25±5.76	16.92±5.57	1.004	.368	-
IV: Cultural Integration	13.37±4.69	14.71±5.30	14.99±5.35	2.940	.054	-

* Tukey; 1-Village/town; 2-City; 3-Big city

About 2/3 of the students did not feel themselves excluded from the society whereas 1/3 did. The mean scores for all dimensions of social exclusion according to their feeling of being excluded from the society are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Mean scores for all dimensions of social exclusion according to the answers given to the question: Do you feel yourself excluded from the society?

Dimensions	Yes (N=72)	No (N=221)	t	p
	I: Material Deprivation	21.43±5.03		
IIA: Social Rights*	13.07±4.58	11.61±4.58	2.353	.019
IIB: Social Rights**	19.21±5.94	17.43±5.34	2.380	.018
III: Social Participation	19.97±5.50	16.49±5.50	4.667	.000
IV: Cultural Integration	14.60±5.60	14.33±5.03	.387	.699

*II A Social rights: able to benefit from public institutions and aid in terms of social rights

** II B Social rights: able to benefit from a suitable house and a secure environment

Students who felt themselves excluded from the society got higher scores for all dimensions of the social exclusion scale except the cultural integration dimension.

4. Conclusion

In this study we wanted to measure social exclusion among a group of Turkish university students by using the Social Exclusion Scale developed by Jehoel-Gijsbers&Vrooman. But because social exclusion is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, it is not easy to represent it with a single item. A numerical index for social exclusion which allows an absolute threshold to be drawn above or below which social exclusion can be said to exist is needed.

As a conclusion, 25.0% of our study participants felt themselves socially excluded. Having a poor economic situation was found to be related to social exclusion and those who reported themselves as being in a poor economic situation felt them to be socially excluded more than those with a good economic situation. Knowing people's perspectives on poverty and social exclusion is important because the subjective evaluation of these issues has a significant impact on individual functioning [19]. The significant relationship between participants' feelings of social exclusion and poor economic situation is consistent with Jordan's theory on poverty and social exclusion, which states that social exclusion, is responsible for poverty [20]. Feeling left out of the society increases the chances that people would live in communities where there are many other poor and socially excluded individuals. The study of Robila (2006) found that people who feel more socially excluded report also more community poverty and community exclusion[21]. On the other hand, poverty could be a predictor of social exclusion. According to Devicienti and Poggi, poverty and social exclusion show a low correlation over time for the same individual and they are not two sides of the same coin, plus there are dynamic cross effects, implying that poverty and social exclusion are mutually reinforcing [22]. Bhalla and Lapeyre brought up an important point in their paper: "In poor societies, economic deprivation is at the heart of the problem of exclusion. Any claim in these societies to income has a greater relative weight than a claim to political and civil rights" [5]. In their study, among 1,863 residents of

six different cities in Turkey, Adaman&Ardıç (2008) found that 46.0% of the respondents felt themselves to be socially excluded because of poverty[15]; 30.0% because of their educational level, and 29.0% because of their dress and outward finery. Both these and our own study results suggest that poverty is a major component of perceived social exclusion.

It is clear that when a large part of the population is struggling for survival, when people are excluded from the main sources of income, their first priority is survival and a basic livelihood. Obviously, there are some links between poverty and feelings of social exclusion but these links should be studied further on a longitudinal basis.

There are some limitations of our study which can be summarized as follows: Firstly, the data we used depended on self-reporting and may have been the cause of recall bias and under-reporting. Secondly, the data we used are cross-sectional; therefore two-way causal effects cannot be estimated. Detailed longitudinal data are needed to create enough time distance between causes and consequences. Thirdly, we did not take ethnicity and religious beliefs into account, which may have some impact on feelings of social exclusion.

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