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### AN EVALUATION OF THE REASONS WHY FORMER SOLDIERS TRANSFERRING FROM TURKISH ARMED FORCES TO OFFICIALSHIP, THEIR VIEW OF SPIRITUALITY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL COUNSELING AND GUIDANCE

### TÜRK SİLAHLI KUVVETLERİNDEN MEMURLUĞA GEÇİŞ YAPAN ESKİ ASKERLERİN GEÇİŞ NEDENLERİ, MANEVİYATA BAKIŞLARI VE MANEVİ DANIŞMANLIK VE REHBERLİĞİN ÖNEMİ ÜZERİNE BİR ÇALIŞMA

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#### ABSTRACT

This research focuses on soldiers' transition from the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) to civilian employment. It is observed that TAF personnel undergo changes in assignments. Accordingly, the prominent question addressed in study is "For what reasons have soldiers chosen to leave the position of TAF personnel and transition to civil service employment?". The research aims to examine the reasons behind the personnel loss within the TAF and provide recommendations to address it. At this stage, it is believed that Spiritual Counselling and Guidance (SCG) could be an important factor in keeping TAF personnel together. A historical examination of the Turkish Army reveals that spirituality and religion have been crucial in maintaining unity and motivation among military personnel. Similarly, it is suggested that clergy, who played an important role during the Ottoman period, could positively influence military personnel through the provision of spiritual care. This study aims to investigate the underlying reasons for personnel attrition within the TAF and address the gap identified in the existing literature. Data were collected from 23 exmilitary personnel employed at Sivas Cumhuriyet University using a 16-question structured questionnaire, a spiritual sensitivity scale and a three-question structured interview. According to research findings, the decision to transition from TAF to civil service and the duration of transition were influenced by the age of military personnel, resulting in a shorter transition period. It was observed that the reasons for joining the TAF affect the inclination to transition to civil service. It was noted that individuals seeking psychological counseling and guidance exhibited higher levels of value sensitivity. Participants showed higher levels of community sensitivity than awareness

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and mystery sensitivity. Findings obtained from interview questions revealed that participants perceived SCG services as supportive and crucial for preventing suicide, alleviating psychological distress, and fostering a stronger sense of duty.

**Keywords:** *Spiritual counseling and care, Turkish Armed Forces, Spirituality, Mental Health, Suicide.*

## ÖZ

Bu araştırma, Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri'nden (TSK) sivil istihdama geçen askerlerin geçiş nedenlerine ve maneviyat algılarına odaklanmaktadır. TSK personelinin kimi zaman görevlerinde değişiklikler yaşadığı gözlemlenmiştir. Bu doğrultuda, çalışmada ele alınan önemli soru, "Askerler, TSK personeli pozisyonunu neden bırakarak sivil memurluğa geçiş yapmayı tercih etmiştir?" sorusudur. Araştırma TSK içindeki personel kaybının nedenlerini incelemeyi ve bu duruma yönelik öneriler sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu noktada, Manevi Danışmanlık ve Rehberliğin (MDR) TSK personelinin bir arada tutmada önemli bir faktör olabileceği düşünülmektedir. Türk Ordusunun tarihine bakıldığında maneviyat ve din, ordu mensuplarını bir arada tutan ve motivasyon sağlayan önemli bir etkenidir. Benzer şekilde Osmanlı döneminde önemli bir işlev gören din adamlarının manevi destek hizmeti kapsamında ordu personellerine olumlu katkı sağlayacağına inanılmaktadır. Bu çalışmayla, TSK'nın personel kaybının sebepleri irdelenerek literatürde görülen boşluğun doldurulması amaçlanmaktadır. Buna göre çalışmada Sivas Cumhuriyet Üniversitesinde görev yapan eski askeriye kökenli 23 personelin verileri kullanılmıştır. Çalışmaya Sivas Cumhuriyet Üniversitesinde görev yapan askerlikten memurluğa geçmiş 32 kişiden 23'üne ulaşılmıştır. Sivas ilinde yaşayan evrenin yaklaşık %72'sine ulaşılmıştır. Çalışmada hem nitel hem de nicel verilerden faydalanılmıştır. Çalışma, 16 soruluk yapılandırılmış bir anket, manevi duyarlılık ölçeği ve üç soruluk yapılandırılmış bir görüşmeden oluşmaktadır. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre, TSK'den memuriyete geçme kararı alma ve geçme süresi yaşı askeri personelde etkili olmuş ve bu yüzden de daha kısa sürmüştür. TSK'ye girme sebeplerinin işsizlik veya geçim kaygısı olanların TSK'den memuriyete geçme düşüncesine sahip oldukları görülmüştür. TSK'ye girme sebebi memuriyete geçme düşüncesini etkilemektedir. Psikolojik danışmanlık ve rehberlik merkezine başvuranların değer duyarlılıklarının da yüksek olduğu görülmüştür. Katılımcıların toplum duyarlılıklarının farkındalık ve gizem duyarlılığı ve değer duyarlılığına göre daha yüksek ortalamaya sahip olduğu belirlenmiştir. Görüşme sorularından elde edilen bulgular, katılımcıların MDR hizmetlerini, intiharı önleme, psikolojik sıkıntıyı hafifletme ve daha güçlü bir görev bilinci geliştirme konularında destekleyici ve önemli olarak gördüğünü ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Manevi danışmanlık ve rehberlik, Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri, Maneviyat, Ruh Sağlığı, İntihar.*

## 1.Introduction

The most important force responsible for a country's defense and security is its military organizations. The military force is a complex system with a deeprooted history consisting of tradition, customs, and language (Moon, 2016). In Turkey, the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) undertake this defense task. What distinguishes the TAF from other public roles is the principle of absolute obedience (Sarraq, 2022). Discipline and obedience to orders

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within the military are the main elements that ensure the country's security. Human psychology can be strained in an environment where there are constraints, responsibilities, and the possibility of death. In such situations, there is a need for a psychological center that soldiers can turn to when necessary. Indeed, the TAF has psychological support units. The Regulation on Guidance and Psychological Counseling Services of the Ministry of National Defense, published in the Official Newspaper dated May 22, 2022, and numbered 31488, provides a detailed description of the duties in this regard.

However, the number of centers providing psychological support in the TAF is insufficient. Encouraging soldiers to seek psychological help will make it more likely for them to benefit from such services (Urgun, 2007). In the Turkish military, there are psychological effects that are not externally visible but occur as a result of exposure to war, such as PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), depression, and anxiety (Yılmaz, 2009). According to Williams (2014: 62), while the state recognizes physical disabilities related to war, it should not overlook psychological disabilities. Many of the behaviors and symptoms reported by veterans overlap with the PTSD symptoms identified by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). Intense occupational stress can lead to various addictions (Çıkınlar, 2007; Kılınç, 2017; Urgun, 2007). On the other hand, the psychological wellbeing of soldiers is crucial due to the demands of their duties (Koçak, 2012).

In this study, the concept of spirituality is addressed. Spirituality, like religion, has various definitions (Hill & Pargament, 2008). The common element in all definitions is that spirituality refers to the relationship with a higher being (Düzgüner, 2021). In the Western context, military communities are served by pastoral caregivers who provide professional guidance and advice to all military personnel on matters of spirituality, religious dynamics, ethics, morality, and personal wellbeing. Military couples, especially, often seek the assistance of clergy within their faith communities when facing difficulties in their relationships. Pastoral caregivers address relational challenges faced by military couples and strive to provide them with support. As a result, military chaplains and civilian clergy members have become trusted advisors for many military couples seeking support. This trust is built, in part, due to the absolute confidentiality provided by military chaplains as members of the clergy (Cheney, 2017).

On the other hand, research conducted in clinical settings has shown that the combination of psychological/clinical therapy and pastoral/spiritual care can be beneficial for healing from PTSD and moral injury (Ayten, 2018; Frenk et al., 2011; Hatamipour et al., 2015; H. G. Koenig & Larson, 2001; Shiah et al., 2015). Spiritual Counseling and Guidance (SCG) providers can assist military personnel in gaining new perspectives, even in relation to physical aspects, while working with veterans or service members. Ultimately, research in clinical practice (Baumeister & MacKenzie, 2011; H. Koenig, 2010) suggests that spiritual care can serve as a complementary element in addressing conditions such as PTSD that

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may develop in military personnel (Grimell, 2019a: 107). Additionally, a research study conducted with operational commando units found that military personnel who believe in the purpose and mission due to their religious beliefs had a lower frequency of PTSD (Ünlü, 2014). Furthermore, according to a study by Özdemir (2013: 110), individuals with internal religious orientation exhibited a more positive attitude towards the military and military service.

In recent years, especially in the context of the United States, there has been a growing focus among clinicians and researchers in the field of psychology on the psychological and spiritual dimensions of soldiers, which are often unseen. Grimell emphasizes the need for and potential of SCG in this regard. According to Grimell, what is important is to provide a theological perspective to the construction of military identity. Using theological terminology, it can be said that military group members become sacred to each other and are even considered worth dying for (Grimell, 2019b).

It is believed that instilling a sense of sacred purpose within the military, as seen in the Christian tradition, would lead to more effective and healthier soldiers. Similarly, in the context of Turkey, it is believed that having a spiritual support system within the TAF would be beneficial from a psychosocial perspective.

However, in a study conducted with Turkish hospital spiritual caregivers, one participant told; "While I was serving at a hospital near the border, injured soldiers from Syria would come and ask me, 'Sir, they also shout "Allahu Akbar" (God is Great) when they are in combat. Which one of us will become a martyr?' Some of them feel sad because they couldn't take a proper shower for a long time. They say, 'Sir, it's not about dying, but it's about not being able to perform ablution (ritual purification) that troubles us deep inside'," (Güler Ünal, 2022: 322-323).

As seen, religious elements are intertwined with life by the essence of the Islamic religion, thus giving rise to a need for spiritual care. On the other hand, provision of spiritual care in the military is not a new concept for the TAF. When we look at Turkish history, as seen in the next chapter, it can be observed that during the Ottoman period, religious officials were involved in social life and played an important role, especially during the National Liberation War. In the next section it will be evaluated, how *Military SCG* was carried out and valued in Turkish history.

### **1.a. Spiritual Care in the Ottoman Period**

When we look at Turkish history, particularly during the establishment of the Ottoman Empire, we come across the relationship between a *sheikh* (religious figure) and the army. It is evident that the sheikhs and *dervishes* (mystics), who were responsible for improving the morale and spirituality of the army and leading prayers, actively participated in battles (Işık, 2016). The carefully selected *Army sheikhs* were treated with great respect by the

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state, provided with salaries, and held in high regard (Işık, 2016; Kocaoğlu, 2020).

In the later periods of the Ottoman Empire, similar roles were assigned to *imams* (prayer leaders) within the military. Religious officials, known as *Shifahan*, were present alongside the army during wartime and recited the *Shifai Sharif* (Noble Healing) prayers. These officials continued their duties until their passing, after which a new *Shifahan* was appointed without delay. Another noteworthy practice was the presence of prayer leaders, known as *duaci*, who accompanied personnel and recited prayers during production processes at military facilities. This was considered important, to the extent that upon the passing of a prayer leader, an experienced and knowledgeable replacement was appointed promptly. Overall, spiritual care played a significant role in the Ottoman period, with sheikhs, dervishes, imams and other religious figures actively contributing to the wellbeing and spiritual upliftment of the army. The duties of religious officials during wartime were to provide motivation and offer prayers, while during peacetime, they would engage in religious practices alongside the military personnel (Kocaoğlu, 2020).

According to İnam (2018), during the Battle of Çanakkale, the presence of official imams within the army played a crucial role in fostering a sense of consciousness. Similarly, Muhammedi (2014) attributes Alp Arslan's success in the Battle of Malazgirt to his strong religious and spiritual foundation.

In summary, religious officials served as a source of religious and spiritual motivation within the military structure during the Ottoman era. *Sufi* (mystics) sheikhs provided support to the army through their prayers and also actively participated in battles outside of the *tekkes* (Sufi lodges), contributing to the morale and motivation of the soldiers. It can be observed that throughout Turkish history, religious officials served in the military as healers and providers of spiritual care for many centuries.

### **1.b. Spirituality and Religion in the TAF during the Republic of Turkey**

Spirituality and religion in the TAF have been based on a secular understanding since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey (Şahin, 2014). Therefore, the military discipline and ethical values in the TAF reflect the notion that religion is a personal matter and that the military institution maintains a secular identity. The principle of secularism in the TAF does not allow military personnel to express their religious beliefs or use religious symbols as they serve as public officials. Soldiers must fulfill their duties in accordance with principles of neutrality and independence (Koca Peker, 2022). While religious qualifications such as martyrdom and veteran status continue to exist within the military, paradoxically, the presence of religious and spiritual elements within the institution has not been allowed for a long time.

### **1.c. Description of the Problem and Purpose**

Being a soldier in a country like Turkey, which is affected by terrorist attacks and neighboring countries' wars, brings along certain difficulties. Therefore, it is not uncommon to come across former military personnel in official institutions working as civil servants. The reasons behind why soldiers undergo a change in their duties have been a subject of curiosity and research in this study. In this study, it is believed that former soldiers will express themselves much more openly compared to when they were still serving as soldiers in the TAF. Additionally, the loss of trained personnel in the TAF needs to be prevented, and existing problems need to be resolved. However, no study specifically addressing the transition in duties of trained personnel in the TAF has been found in the literature. This study aims to fill this gap and investigate the reasons why former military personnel transitioned to civilian employment. Based on the reasons for the change in duties of soldiers, possible solutions can be identified to prevent the loss of trained soldiers. The Military Force, which is one of the most important pillars of a nation, should be treated with utmost care, and efforts should be made to address potential issues and find solutions.

Ultimately, it is understood that psychological support is crucial in the TAF. Therefore, it is important to increase the presence of centers providing psychological services and encourage these soldiers to seek help (Urgun, 2007). At this point, it is believed that the addition of a SCG service can be significant in terms of psychological support. In fact, spiritual caregiver are currently serving, for example in Turkish hospitals. The question of how the SCG service will be implemented within the TAF is of interest in this study.

SCG is seen as a potential supportive element in terms of personnel loss in the TAF and psychological services. Historical data, as seen, reveals that the Turkish military has not been distant from incorporating religious and spiritual elements. In this regard, it is assumed that a spiritual caregiver can play a key role in fostering a more positive and healthy psychosocial relationship within the TAF. Within this context, it is believed that the involvement of spiritual care in psychological service centers, in an interdisciplinary manner, can be productive.

In this regard, the main question of this study is as follows: "For what reasons or factors have soldiers chosen to leave their positions as military personnel and transition to civilian desk jobs? When they reflect on their past profession as soldiers, would they perceive a spiritual caregiver as beneficial?" To answer this question, an explorative survey study was conducted. Furthermore a three question interview was administered to examine the participants' thoughts on the SCG service. Additionally, this study also aimed to explore the spirituality perceptions of former military personnel and included it within the scope of the research. The reason for this additional inquiry is to assess whether the participants' expressions regarding spiritual care are in line with their spiritual sensitivities, or in other words, to determine if they have been influenced by it. Therefore, the expected outcome of

the study is that participants with higher spirituality perceptions would express a greater desire for the presence of the SCG service in the military. On the other hand, participants with lower spirituality perceptions may not view the SCG service positively.

The aim of this study is to examine the reasons for job changes among former military personnel. Additionally, it aims to explore the participants' spiritual sensitivities and their opinions on the Military SCG Service. Therefore, this study adopts a mixed methods approach, specifically a field study design. The necessary permissions were obtained from the Sivas Cumhuriyet University Ethics Committee through a letter dated October 28, 2022, with the reference number E-60263016-050.06.04-224146. The sample is limited to former military personnel employed at Sivas Cumhuriyet University.

## **2.Method**

### **2.a. Participants**

Between October and December 2023, based upon voluntary participation, a total of 23 out of 32 individuals who transitioned from military service to civil service at Sivas Cumhuriyet University were selected as a sample. Thus, approximately 72% of the population residing in Sivas province was covered. The participants who were reached were assigned pseudonyms such as P1, P2, etc. All participants were male. It is determined that 13% of the participants who previously served in the TAF and currently work at Sivas Cumhuriyet University are between the ages of 18-35, 52.2% are between the ages of 36-44, 21.7% are between the ages of 45-50, and 13% are 50 years old and above. Furthermore, 91.3% of the participants are married, 8.7% are single, 8.7% have no children, 13% have 2 children, and 60.9% have three or more children. In terms of education, 4.3% have a high school diploma or lower, 21.7% have an associate degree, 60.9% have a bachelor's degree, and 13% have a postgraduate education. In terms of military service duration, 17.4% served for less than 5 years, 26.1% served between 5-10 years, and 56.5% served between 10-15 years.

### **2.b. Data Collection Instruments**

In this study, three different measurement forms have been used. Accordingly, the research employed a structured questionnaire consisting of 16 questions, a spiritual sensitivity scale, and structured interview of three questions. In this study, a structured interview was utilized because it includes both predetermined questions and allows for comprehensive discussions. The interview questions were prepared with the assistance of Spiritual Care experts and based on recommendations from nonparticipating military personnel. The scale used in the research is the Spiritual Sensitivity Scale developed by Tirri et al., which was translated into Turkish, validated, and made reliable through the study conducted by Elban and Aslan (2022). The interviews were conducted by one of the authors personally.

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## **2.c. Research Design and Data Analysis**

The research employed a mixed design incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods. In the quantitative segment of this study, participants were administered the structured questionnaire including sociodemographic form and Spiritual Sensitivity Scale in paper format. Initially, the demographic characteristics of the research data were examined. The reliability coefficient of the used Spiritual Sensitivity Scale, measured by Cronbach's Alpha, was assessed. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the Spiritual Sensitivity Scale was found to be 0.81. Since this coefficient is above 0.70, it can be said that the scale is highly reliable. Then, the normality of the obtained data was tested. Since the data did not follow a normal distribution, nonparametric tests were employed. The chi-square test was used to compare qualitative variables. The significance level was set at 0.05 and 0.10. The statistical analysis was conducted using the SPSS software package.

In the qualitative part of the study, after presenting the scale and questionnaire, the researcher verbally introduced the definition of SCG to the participants and asked three questions. The definition provided by the researcher to the participants regarding SCG is as follows: "SCG provider is an expert who utilizes modern psychological counseling techniques and combines them with religious and spiritual methods in a holistic approach to help individuals cope with issues related to religion, spirituality, and everyday stress." (Regulation Regarding National Occupational Standards –RRNO, 25 October 2019). After this definition, participants were asked three questions:

1. Would you like to have SCG services in the TAF?
2. Would such a service be beneficial for soldiers? Regardless of whether your answer is yes or no, why?
3. Do you have any memorable experiences that you would like to share with us?

Among the verbal responses, nine participants gave permission for audio recording. Six participants provided written responses to the interview questions, while eight participants gave short verbal responses. The provided answers were transcribed.

The responses were examined using the inductive thematic analysis method outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis aligns with both essentialist and constructionist approaches in psychology. Its theoretical flexibility makes thematic analysis a versatile and valuable research tool capable of yielding a rich, detailed, and complex understanding of the data. Themes or patterns within the data can be identified inductively. In this methodology, inductive analysis involves coding the data without trying to fit it into a preexisting coding framework or the researcher's predefined analytical concepts. As a result, this form of thematic analysis can be described as data driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006).



During the transcription process, the researcher initially took notes pertinent to the research topic. Subsequently, the researcher conducted coding to capture a variety of potential themes. Text segments addressing similar issues were then grouped into analytical categories. The data were thoroughly examined to find information supporting each category. As a result, the researcher identified two main themes.

The themes identified from the interviews have been categorized as follows: a) The belief that SCG serves as a significant alternative for mental health in the army, and b) The belief that SCG practice in the Turkish Army can prevent suicide. Any fragmented or incomplete sentences that could affect the clarity of meaning have been suitably completed to ensure they convey the intended message accurately.

The responses to these questions have been addressed under their respective question headings in the results section. It was deemed more advantageous and fitting to abstain from excluding segments where participants shared their personal experiences while addressing the questions, enabling these expressions to be showcased to the reader. This approach aimed to offer readers a profound comprehension and acknowledgment of the participants' narratives and perspectives. Thus, in the qualitative part of this study, participants' statements were interpreted through description in order to make sense of their experiences.

### 3. Results

According to the findings obtained from the research, as seen in Table 1, it is observed that 43.5% of the participants had the intention to switch to another civil service while serving in the TAF, 43.5% did not have this intention, and 13% were undecided. The reasons for leaving the TAF were identified as family reasons for 43.5% of the participants, burnout or difficulty in job for 34.8%, and other reasons for 21.7%. After the change in duty, 65.2% of the participants felt peaceful, 17.4% felt safe, 8.7% did not experience any difference, and 8.7% had other emotions. In terms of job satisfaction at the university, 91.3% were satisfied and 8.7% were dissatisfied. 56.5% of the participants had access to Psychological Counseling and Guidance (PCG) Center at the TAF, while 43.5% did not. 21.7% felt the need to seek help from the PCG Center, while 78.3% did not feel the need. Among those who sought help, 16.7% were able to find solutions to their problems, while 83.3% could not. Participants shared their problems with their parents for 13%, with their spouses for 56.5%, with their colleagues for 21.7%, and with other individuals for 8.7%. 65.2% of the participants had previously heard about SCG service, while 34.8% had not. The reasons for joining the TAF were found to be unemployment or livelihood concerns for 47.8%, patriotism for 26.1%, and professional respect for 26.1%.

In the 8th question of the survey, "What is your reason for leaving the TAF," the responses under the "other" option are as follows: "benefits and rights," "I was not accepted as a noncommissioned officer because I studied at an Imam Hatip school (religious based

school)," "lack of acceptance by our superiors," "my spouse's health problems," "spiritual reasons," "benefits and rights, my spouse's headscarf, my child studying in other cities."

In question 9 of the survey, "How do you feel after the change in duty," the response under the "other" option is as follows: "terrible."

Regarding question 14, "Who did you share your problems with," the response is "I wouldn't share them with anyone."

**Table 1: Responses of Participants to the Survey Questions**

Variables		N	%
1- Age	18-35	3	13
	36-44	12	52,2
	45-50	5	21,7
	50 and above	3	13
2- Marital Status	Married	21	91,3
	Single	2	8,7
3- Children	None	2	8,7
	1	3	13
	2	14	60,9
	3 and above	4	17,4
4- Education Level	Elementary School and Below	1	4,3
	Associate's Degree	5	21,7
	Bachelor's degree	14	60,9
	Post Graduate	3	13
5- How many years did you serve as military personnel before transitioning to civilian employment?	5 years and below	4	17,4
	5-10 years	6	26,1
	10-15 years	13	56,5
6- How long did it take for you to decide to transfer from TAF to civil service and how long did it take for you to become a civil servant?	1 year and below	10	43,5
	2-3 years	7	30,4
	4-6 years	4	17,4
	7 years and above	2	8,7
7- After you started working in the TAF, did you think that this job was not for you and that you should move to another civil service?	Yes	10	43,5
	No	10	43,5
	undecided	3	13
8- What is your reason for leaving the TAF?	Family reasons	10	43,5
	Job burnout / difficulty	8	34,8
	Other	5	21,7
9- How do you feel after the change in your duties?	Peaceful	15	65,2
	Safe	4	17,4
	There is no difference	2	8,7
	Other	2	8,7
10- Are you satisfied with the role you have in the university?	Yes	21	91,3
	No	2	8,7
11- Did the TAF have a psychological counseling and guidance center that you could turn to when you experienced distressing situations?	Yes	13	56,5
	No	10	43,5
12- If there was a Psychological Counseling and Guidance	Yes	5	21,7

Center, did you feel the need to seek help from them?	No	18	78,3
13- If yes, were you able to find solutions to your problems?	Yes	1	16,7
	No	5	83,3
14- If no, to whom did you share your problems?	Mother / Father	3	13
	Spouse	13	56,5
	Colleagues	5	21,7
	Other	2	8,7
15- Have you heard of SCG (spiritual care, spiritual support) services before?	Yes	15	65,2
	No	8	34,8
16- What was your reason for joining the TAF?	Unemployment / Financial concerns	11	47,8
	Patriotism	6	26,1
	Professional prestige	6	26,1

### a. Analysis of the Five-Point Likert Scale

When the obtained data was analyzed, it was determined that it did not follow a normal distribution according to the Shapiro-Wilk test. Therefore, non-parametric tests were used. A significance level of 0.05 was chosen for the study.

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation Values of Spiritual Sensitivity Scale Dimensions

Dimensions	N	M	SD
Awareness and Mystery Sensitivity	23	4,03	,46
Value Sensitivity	23	4,04	,86
Social Sensitivity	23	4,14	,61
Spiritual Sensitivity	23	4,08	,47

According to Table 2, it has been determined that the participants have a mean score of 4.08 for the Spiritual Sensitivity scale, a mean score of 4.03 for Awareness and Mystery Sensitivity, a mean score of 4.04 for Value Sensitivity, and a mean score of 4.14 for Social Sensitivity. Based on these results, it has been identified that the participants have a higher average score for social sensitivity compared to the other dimensions.

Table 3. Mann Whitney U Test Results to Determine the Difference According to Marital Status and Spiritual Sensitivity Scale Dimensions

2- Marital Status	N	M	P
Awareness and Mystery Sensitivity	Married	21	12,71
	Single	2	4,50
Value Sensitivity	Married	21	12,24
	Single	2	9,50
Social Sensitivity	Married	21	11,81
	Single	2	14,00

According to Table 3, a statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.10$ ) has been observed between the marital status of the participants and their Awareness and Mystery Sensitivity. Based on these results, it can be stated that married individuals have higher levels of Awareness and Mystery Sensitivity compared to unmarried individuals.

Table 4. Kruskal Wallis Test Results for Determining the Difference According to the Status of Applying to Psychological Counselling and Guidance Centre and Spiritual Sensitivity Scale Dimensions

12- If there was a Psychological Counseling and Guidance Center, did you feel the need to seek help from them?		N	M	P
Awareness and Mystery Sensitivity	Yes	5	12,2	,939
	No	18	11,94	
Value Sensitivity	Yes	5	16,4	,091*
	No	18	10,78	
Social Sensitivity	Yes	5	12,1	,970
	No	18	11,97	

According to Table 4, a statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.10$ ) has been observed between the participants' utilization of psychological counseling and guidance center and their Value Sensitivity dimension. Based on these results, it can be stated that individuals who sought psychological counseling and guidance have higher levels of Value Sensitivity.

### **b. Qualitative Research Results**

The following results are categorized under headings corresponding to the three interview questions.

#### *Question 1. Would You Like To Have SCG Services in The TAF?*

In response to the first interview question, it was observed that all participants provided positive answers. In addition to the "yes" responses, participants who expressed their desire for the presence of SCG services provided detailed explanations:

"I would definitely want it, as I believe it would be beneficial (P1)."

"I would like to have SCG services in the TAF because it is a challenging profession. There are difficulties in adaptation and adjustment. Given the demanding nature of the profession, having this guidance service would be beneficial (P2)."

As seen, there are participants who want this service to be available because they believe it would be beneficial. Furthermore, there are participants who refer to the spiritual aspect of the service:

"I would want it. There was a similar service under the name of Psychological Counseling

and Guidance, but having spiritual care would bring a different dimension to it (P4)."

"Yes, I think it would be very beneficial. Moreover, in this counseling and guidance service, I would like the emphasis to be placed on guiding individuals to increase their sense of belonging and strengthen their love for the country (P5)."

*Question 2. Would such a service be beneficial for soldiers? Regardless of whether your answer is yes or no, why?*

All participants have expressed that SCG service would be beneficial to soldiers. Their responses include: "yes," "it would be beneficial, yes," "definitely yes," "yes, and very much so," "it would definitely be beneficial." Participants who believe in its usefulness and provide reasons have stated the following:

"It would be beneficial; I believe that soldiers facing difficulties would be able to overcome their problems through such consultations (P1)."

"Such a service would definitely be beneficial to soldiers in the military who experience a lot of psychological issues (P2)."

"Especially in the military, there are two distinctions: soldiers and ranking personnel. I'm not sure if it would be beneficial to soldiers, but I believe it would be very beneficial to ranking personnel (P4)."

"Yes, I am convinced it would be very beneficial because individuals would be able to share and alleviate their psychological issues arising from the differences between the society they belong to and the military, and as a result, they would be more beneficial to the military (P5)."

"Yes, I believe it would be very beneficial because people in demanding positions need psychological relief (P6)."

"Of course, yes, because it would provide an environment where soldiers could more easily explain their difficulties (P9)."

"Yes, problems could be solved (P12)."

Some participants believe that spiritual care service would benefit soldiers' mental wellbeing. Additionally, participants expressed their belief that through this service, spiritual values would be instilled. Their statements include:

"It would always be beneficial. Why? Because the development of spiritual feelings, the provision of religious education, and similar elements would contribute to being more beneficial to the homeland and the nation. Every aspect utilized there let's say, for example,

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when we work, the simplest things like principles of economy are discussed. A person who has these feelings within them would wholeheartedly protect their homeland in every way (P8)."

"Yes, because a person who does not feel spirituality would have a weak sense of belonging (P13)."

*Question 3. Do you have any memorable experiences that you would like to share with us?*

Under this topic seven participants shared their memories. While the remaining participants stated that they didn't have such a memory, one participant mentioned that they didn't want to share their experience due to its heaviness. Here are the statements of the participants who shared their memories:

"Yes, when our comrades in the special forces are martyred or injured, our soldiers experience psychological breakdowns. I believe that this service would be beneficial in this regard (P1)."

"While serving in Şemdinli, the personnel who were supposed to provide support and care for individuals were not doing so. Due to the lack of attention, suicide incidents were quite common there. So, it would be better if priority is given to this issue, especially in the eastern regions (P3)."

"I have many memories. [The participant pauses] One memory that affected me was when a soldier shot himself right in front of my eyes. It had a significant impact on me. If he had known the spiritual aspect of not taking one's own life, he might not have done it. He would have thought that life is something that should be preserved. That's why I believe that spiritual care is important for soldiers (P4)."

"Yes, there are many. After working for 15 years in the gendarmerie, I encountered numerous incidents, especially in the traffic department. One incident that happened when I went to a traffic accident, it was a motorcycle accident, and the person's head was decapitated but still inside the helmet. I will never forget picking him up from the ground, I will never forget the flowing blood. When I was working there, during a conflict, our police colleague in the town center was shot beside me and martyred. I received the news of his martyrdom while they were taking him away in a helicopter. So, individuals go through many such impacts, and having religious and spiritual support helps overcome all kinds of things (P8)."

"While serving in Gaziantep, I was affected when a soldier committed suicide during his duty. When we later learned the reason for the suicide, we found out that he had personal difficulties and problems with his family. Having such a center might have been a preventive factor against this suicide, of course (P9)."

"If more support had been provided in suicide cases, it could have been possible to prevent them. The guidance service should be utilized more effectively (P19)."

From the participants' statements, it can be understood that the presence of a spiritual support unit in the TAF is believed to be able to prevent certain suicide incidents. Additionally, there are participants who believe that SCG would be beneficial in cases where soldiers witness death incidents. One participant mentions that they don't have a specific memory, but they express their concern about the psychological support bringing about certain prejudices, stating: "I don't have a memory, but if there were psychological and spiritual care, people would definitely be seen as crazy (P6)."

#### **4. Discussion**

The findings of this study indicate that the reasons for joining the TAF significantly influence the decision to transition to civilian employment and the duration of this process. When exploring the factors that led to changes in duties, it was found that these reasons are complex and multifaceted. While the majority of participants cited family reasons as their primary motivation for leaving the TAF, this was closely followed by work burnout, employment rights, and religious factors.

In terms of seeking psychological help, 21.7% of the participants reported utilizing the Psychological Counseling and Guidance (PCG) Center. Similarly, a related study highlighted that participants who faced logistical barriers and had specific preferences about treatment types were less likely to initiate mental health treatment and attended fewer sessions overall. In contrast, individuals who endorsed stigma-related beliefs or relied on alternative coping mechanisms were more likely to engage in suicidal behavior (Short et al., 2024).

However, 83.3% of those who sought psychological help reported that their issues were not resolved. Data obtained from the spirituality scale revealed that married personnel exhibited higher levels of awareness and sensitivity to mystery compared to their single counterparts. Additionally, those who sought psychological counseling and guidance demonstrated higher value sensitivities.

Another finding from this study is that the participants have a high average level of societal sensitivity. It is believed that these high values influence their thoughts on SCG services. However, the expectation formed at the beginning of the research that "individuals with high spirituality perceptions would desire more SCG services in the military" was not confirmed in this study. The reason for this is that all participants have a positive attitude towards SCG. Since all participants had a positive view of SCG and there was no variance in perceptions.

An important question that emerged during the study was why participants believed SCG

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services would be beneficial. Based on participants' statements, it can be inferred that the positive attitude toward SCG stems primarily from the significance of religion and spirituality. One participant remarked, "Religious and spiritual support helps overcome any kind of difficulty." Participants emphasized that SCG could increase their sense of belonging and strengthen their patriotism, underscoring its potential benefits. SCG was also perceived as a preventive measure against suicide due to its spiritual nature. For instance, one participant expressed that an individual with a spiritual understanding discouraging suicide might reconsider their decision, highlighting the importance of cherishing life. Therefore, participants regarded SCG as a more effective component of psychological services compared to other approaches.

The importance of SCG services has been underscored by several studies (Best et al., 2024; O'Connor et al., 2024). These studies emphasize the role of spirituality in addressing moral injury, which is prevalent in military contexts (Doehring, 2019; Layson et al., 2023; Orak et al., 2023; Ormsby et al., 2017). Furthermore, ethical dilemmas (Whiting et al., 2020), and moral injury have been associated with suicidal behavior within military populations (Diekmann et al., 2023; Jamieson et al., 2023).

A noteworthy statement made during the study was that "having spiritual care would bring a different dimension to the matter." This "different dimension" reflects the perception of SCG as a more positive and supportive platform. Participants viewed SCG as a safe space where soldiers could express themselves more openly, strengthening their spiritual feelings and sense of duty.

Furthermore, this study highlights the belief among participants that SCG services could serve as a preventive measure against suicide incidents. Suicide remains a critical concern within the military context (Ringer et al., 2021; Straud et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2024). Among the seven participants who shared personal anecdotes, four referenced suicide cases and the potential role of SCG in preventing such incidents. This underscores the need for further research into the perceived connection between SCG and suicide prevention.

Many existing military SCG services have developed suicide prevention programs (Ford et al., 2024; Lee-Tauler et al., 2023; Santiago et al., 2023; Sinnott et al., 2024; Wortmann et al., 2023) and initiatives to enhance the mental health of soldiers and veterans (Courtney et al., 2024; Echols, 2021; Layson et al., 2023; Schuhmann et al., 2023; West & Cronshaw, 2023). Studies have also shown that experiences with SCG in military settings are beneficial and continue to improve (Grimell, 2022, 2024).

These international implementations and research findings can serve as valuable references for developing a Turkish version of SCG services tailored to the specific needs of military personnel in Turkey.

## **5. Conclusion**

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It is important to acknowledge certain limitations of this study. The research was confined to a sample from the province of Sivas, with only 23 participants. Additionally, it should be emphasized that the study is based on data and interpretations derived from the researcher's observations.

However, when considering the statements of all participants, it can be said that there is positive expectation among participants towards SCG services due to their spiritual nature. Thus, it can be understood that former military personnel have a great hope for SCG. The responses of the individuals who participated in this study emphasized the concepts of patriotism, death, suicide, and spirituality. Based on the information obtained from the interviews, it can be stated that participants support the implementation of SCG in the military and believe it would be beneficial. They recognized the importance of addressing the spiritual wellbeing of soldiers in addition to their physical and mental wellbeing. Various factors were identified as contributing to the need for military spiritual care, including the stressful and challenging nature of military service, exposure to traumatic experiences, and the search for meaning and purpose in the face of danger. Recognizing the impact of spirituality on mental health and overall wellbeing can contribute to a more holistic approach to supporting military personnel.

On the other hand, the high positive perception of spirituality among the participants may have led to this result. It should be noted that these findings are based on the specific explorative study and is certainly not be representative of the entire population of TAF. Further research is needed to validate and expand upon these findings.

Therefore, it is important to conduct additional experimental studies. Based on the results of this study, several aspects have emerged that require separate and thorough investigation. Further research is needed to:

- Explore if SCG is genuinely helpful in an experimental setting within the military.
- Investigate whether there are varying perceptions of spirituality and religion among soldiers and how these affect their mental wellbeing.

These areas underscore the need for additional research to explore and enhance the understanding of SCG services in the military context. This study attempts to fill a gap by comparatively examining the Muslim SCG application within the Turkish Armed Forces. The data obtained is expected to contribute to the field, improve the understanding of Muslim SCG services, and offer researchers valuable insights for future studies.

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