

The Relationship of Social Exclusion and Well-being in The Context of Hunger and Poverty Threshold

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Açlık ve Yoksulluk Sınırı Bağlamında Sosyal Dışlanma ve İyilik Hali İlişkisi

Abstract

This research aims to analyse the moderating role of household income in the relationship between social exclusion and well-being. A multiple-group analysis was conducted to determine the moderating effect of household income. The study sample included 669 people who participated in the labour market in Kocaeli; were recruited using convenience sampling. The findings showed a significant negative correlation between social exclusion and well-being. This effect was higher for those below the hunger threshold, indicating that, with increased social exclusion, there is a more significant adverse effect on well-being. These findings confirmed the moderating role of household income in the relationship between social exclusion and well-being.

Keywords : Hunger Threshold, Multiple Group Analysis, Poverty Threshold, Social Exclusion, Well-Being.

JEL Classification Codes : I30, I31, I32.

Öz

Bu çalışma, sosyal dışlanma ile iyilik hali arasındaki ilişkide hanehalkı gelirinin düzenleyici rolünü belirlemeyi amaçlamıştır. Araştırmanın örneklemini Kocaeli ilinde işgücü piyasasına bulunan 669 kişi olup kolayda örnekleme yöntemiyle seçilmiştir. Hanehalkı gelirinin düzenleyici etkisini belirlemek için çoklu grup analizi yapılmıştır. Sonuçlar, sosyal dışlanma ile iyilik hali arasında anlamlı bir negatif ilişki olduğunu göstermiştir. Bu etki, açlık sınırının altındakiler için daha yüksek olup sosyal dışlanmadaki artışla birlikte iyilik hali üzerinde daha fazla olumsuz etki olduğunu göstermiştir. Bu bulgular, sosyal dışlanma ve iyilik hali arasındaki ilişkide hanehalkı gelirinin düzenleyici etkisini doğrulamıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler : Açlık Sınırı, Çoklu Grup Analizi, Yoksulluk Sınırı, Sosyal Dışlanma, İyilik Hali.

1. Introduction

Conceptual and empirical developments in the debate over poverty and deprivation have paved the way for the emergence of 'social exclusion'. Although the conceptualisation of the phenomenon of social exclusion is still in its early stages, many researchers believe it stems from solidarity (Levitas, 1998). While solidarity is the support that people receive within specific social networks from those around them (from family, workplace, the community in general, or the state), social exclusion refers to the process that leads to the breakdown of this supportive relationship between society and the individual (Levitas, 1998). Thus, social exclusion, which can be considered as a lack of access to the types of social relationships, traditions, and activities in which the vast majority of people in the society are involved, is not a situation but a 'process' (Gordon et al., 2000: 73).

Social exclusion, which is a complex and multidimensional process, includes the inability to benefit from resources, rights, goods, and services and to participate in every relationship and activity that are open to the majority of people in a society in economic, social, cultural, or political areas (Levitas et al., 2007: 25). Social exclusion can be understood as the continuous and gradual exclusion from full participation in society, including material and symbolic resources produced, supplied, and exploited for making a living, organising life, and participating in developing a better future (cited in Millar, 2007).

Room, who has been influential in the conceptualisation of social exclusion, argues that most of the parameters claimed to be new in social exclusion analyses can also be found in the current poverty and deprivation literature. Room (1999) defines social exclusion as insufficient social inclusion, lack of social integration, and lack of power and regards it as a disadvantageous situation. He emphasises five elements that differentiate poverty and social exclusion. First, social exclusion cannot be measured by income alone but includes a wide range of indicators of living standards; hence, it is multi-dimensional. Second, analysing social exclusion means understanding the processes and identifying the factors which can trigger entry or exit in mainstream society; hence, it is dynamic. Also, social exclusion is about more than just individual living standards but also about the collective resources (or lack of these) in the neighbourhood or community. Regarding differentiation poverty, social exclusion focuses more on relational issues, while poverty primarily focuses on distributional issues. In other words, it refers to inadequate social participation, lack of social integration, and lack of power. Finally, social exclusion is a catastrophic separation from society due to long-standing and multiple deprivations across all the above areas.

There has yet to be a consensus on the conceptualisation of social exclusion; however, the generally accepted notion is that social exclusion and poverty are intertwined, and poverty is a risk factor for social exclusion. The European Commission lists low income, unskilled labour, poor health, disability, migration, low educational level, gender inequality, discrimination, old age, etc., as risk factors for social exclusion (Council of the European Union, 2004: 30). The general acceptance of risk factors in the literature is related to indicators of income and employment; low income and lack of labour force participation are

seen as the main risk factors for social exclusion. People with low incomes tend to be at greater risk of social exclusion than people with high incomes (Millar, 2007; Bradshaw et al., 1998; Levitas et al., 2007).

Although there is no consensus on all the dimensions of social exclusion, a consensus has been reached on some dimensions. These include financial/material deprivation (low income, lack of financial resources, low spending, etc.) and social relations (contact with family and friends, club membership, etc.). Tsakoglou and Papadopoulos (2002) list the dimensions of social exclusion as income poverty, living conditions, living requirements, and social relations. While political and civic participation has been considered a part of social relations in some studies, others consider it a separate dimension (Millar, 2007: 5). Regarding the dimensions of social exclusion, while Burchardt, Grand, and Piachaud (1999) emphasised civic actions such as consumption, production, and political and social participation, Gordon et al. (2000) and Pantazis, Gordon, and Levitas (2006) emphasised the four dimensions of poverty, exclusion from the labour market, exclusion from services, and exclusion from social relations.

When the dimensions or indicators of social exclusion are considered, one of the least emphasised dimensions is quality of life and well-being. However, these concepts repeatedly appear in the social exclusion literature, numerous international documents and government report on social exclusion and related issues (Levitas et al., 2007).

Unlike social exclusion approaches that focus almost entirely on poverty, unemployment or exclusion, the Poverty and Social Exclusion (PSE) approach has included people's quality of life in the survey (Levitas et al., 2007). In this study, Barnes (2005) determined the dimensions of social exclusion as financial status, durable property, housing quality, neighbourhood perception, personal social relations, physical health, and psychological well-being, which examined the relationship between different dimensions. Barnes et al. (2006) also examined the effect of social exclusion on quality of life. They found that many aspects of quality of life (well-being, optimism, life satisfaction, and energy) were mainly associated with 'multiple exclusion' (cited in Levitas et al., 2007: 84).

The Bristol Social Exclusion Matrix (or B-SEM) has considered the quality of life, including well-being, as one of the three basic dimensions of social exclusion. These dimensions are *resources (material/economic resources, access to public and private services, and social resources)*, *participation (economic participation, social participation, culture, education and skills, and political and civic participation)*, and *quality of life (health and well-being, living environment, and crime and harm)* (Levitas et al., 2007).

These dimensions of social exclusion can also be considered as the consequences of social exclusion. At this point, well-being, one of the components of quality of life, becomes essential. The World Health Organization (1946) explained well-being as the '*a status of entire physical, mental and social well-being, not solely absence of disease or infirmity*'. Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi (2009) describe well-being as *a multifaceted phenomenon that*

requires simultaneous consideration of various dimensions such as material living standards (income, consumption, and wealth), health, education, personal activities (including work), political voice and governance, social connections and relationships, environment (present and future conditions), and insecurity (economic and physical). It can be thought that the quality of life or the perception of well-being is a function of the actual conditions experienced in life and what one makes of those conditions. What one makes of those conditions relates to how the individual perceives the conditions. That is to say, individuals' perceptions, ideas, thoughts, attitudes and actions significantly affect their living conditions (Michalos, 2017: 4).

We can consider two approaches, the eudaimonic and hedonic approaches, used in the concept of well-being. The eudaimonic approach to explaining psychological well-being states that human development is not always related to happiness and satisfaction; it also includes broader needs and is versatile. The hedonic approach explaining subjective well-being emphasises maximising pleasure and avoiding pain (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Ryff and Singer (1998) define *eudaimonia* as achieving perfection based on one's unique potential (cited in Ryff, 2017). This approach of Ryff is considered for psychological well-being. Psychological well-being evaluates a person's psychological and social functioning as a measure of well-being. Psychological well-being is the potential of a person to live a meaningful life and cope with real-life difficulties (Ng & Fisher, 2013). According to Ryff (1989), psychological well-being has six dimensions as follows: self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, self-improvement, realising the meaning of one's life (purpose in life), having a sense of ruling the surrounding environment (environmental domination), and self-determination (autonomy). The hedonic approach refers to subjective well-being and has three components: cognitive component (usually defined as life satisfaction), positive affect and negative affect (Diener, 1984). The superiority of positive affect to negative affect can be defined as happiness (Diener & Suh, 1997: 200). In this context, subjective well-being is related to life satisfaction and happiness.

Demographic variables such as gender, age, educational level, social relations, unemployment, and income can be listed as factors that affect an individual's well-being (Diener & Ryan, 2009). Although the psychology literature has ignored the relationship between income and well-being for many years, it is generally accepted that a person's financial condition has a significant effect on well-being (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Diener et al., 2002; Diener et al., 1999; Headey & Wearing, 1992; Veenhoven, 1991; Veenhoven & Hagerty, 2006). Several studies also show that higher income leads to higher levels of well-being. A high income positively affects the well-being of the individual by ensuring that they meet their basic needs for food, security, health, and shelter satisfactorily (Diener et al., 1995; Diener et al., 1993: 197).

From the above, low income or poverty, a risk factor for social exclusion, is also associated with well-being. The concepts of hunger and poverty threshold come to the fore in determining the poverty level. While the hunger threshold is the cost of a food basket consisting of basic foodstuff that a person or household should consume to survive, the

poverty threshold is the total amount of compulsory expenses for clothing, housing, transportation, education, health, and similar needs along with food. It can be assumed that people living below these thresholds are more prone to social exclusion and that increased social exclusion will adversely affect their well-being (World Health Organization, 2010). In this direction, the following hypotheses were formed for the present study:

H0: No moderating impact of hunger and poverty threshold exists in the relationship between social exclusion and well-being.

H1: The moderating impact of hunger and poverty threshold exists in the relationship between social exclusion and well-being. This effect is higher for those below the hunger threshold.

2. Methodology

This research aimed to analyse the moderating role of household income in the relationship between social exclusion and well-being. The sample consisted of 669 participants, recruited through convenience sampling, who participated in the labour market in the Kocaeli province of Türkiye. A quantitative approach was suitable for this research, which was intended to explore the perception of social exclusion and well-being in terms of hunger and poverty threshold.

The research sample is of a size that inspires confidence and exhibits unbiased and appropriate components for the distribution in the population. The sample represents the population. The representativeness of a sample means that it reflects the characteristics of the people from which it is selected in an unbiased manner and is large enough to inspire confidence that the emerging features are stable. Demographic characteristics of the sample (education level, status in the labour market, level of hunger-poverty threshold, etc.) are similar to the distribution in Türkiye. The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants are described in detail in Table 1.

Table: 1
Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Participants

	N	%		N	%
Gender			Marital Status		
Female	288	43	Married	318	47.5
Male	381	57	Single	351	52.5
Age			Status in the Labour Market		
18-23	87	13	Unemployed	154	23
24-29	238	35.6	Paid workers	404	60.4
30 - 35	112	16.7	Employer/Self-employed	111	16.6
36 - 41	67	10			
42 - 49	94	14.1			
50 - 64	71	10.6			
Educational Level			Household Income		
Below High School	72	10.8	Below Hunger Threshold	51	7.6
High School/Vocational High School	232	34.7	Hunger Threshold-Poverty Threshold	506	75.6
Undergraduate	321	48	Above Poverty Threshold	112	16.7
Postgraduate	44	6.6			
Total	669	100		669	100

Two questionnaires were carried out face-to-face to collect the data from those who agreed to participate in the study.

Social Exclusion Scale

The 5-point Likert scale developed for measuring social exclusion by Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vrooman (2007) has four dimensions: material deprivation, inadequate access to government services, inadequate social integration and cultural integration. The scale comprises 33 questions scored from '1' (strongly disagree) to '5' (strongly agree). Cronbach's Alpha value was calculated to determine the reliability of the scale, and the reliability level of the scale was found to be high (0.849).

Well-being Scale

The 5-point Likert scale with 42 questions developed by Ryff (1989) has six dimensions self-acceptance, positive relationships, self-improvement, purpose in life, environmental domination, and autonomy. The questions are scored on a range from '1' (strongly disagree) to '5' (strongly agree). Cronbach's Alpha value was calculated to determine the reliability of the scale, and the reliability level of the scale was found to be high (0.809).

Demographic Questions

Some demographic questions concern the participant's age, gender, education, marital status, professions, and household income.

Process and Analysis

The data were analysed with IBM SPSS 21 and AMOS 21. In line with the purpose of the research, a multi-group analysis was conducted to compare groups. In social sciences, in comparisons between groups, it is a significant issue whether the difference is due to the group or the measurement tool. Before starting the comparative analysis of group differences, it is helpful to test whether the measurement tool used is understood in the same way in the groups to be compared. Measurement equivalence tests are needed for this (Gürbüz, 2019).

To ensure that the four-factor social exclusion scale and the six-factor well-being scale show measurement equivalence regarding household income groups defined in the study, we tested them using IBM AMOS 21. Regarding measurement equivalence, configural, metric, and scalar equivalence was calculated. According to the results (Table 2), the two scales had measurement equivalence configural, metric, and scalar equivalence.

Table: 2
Measurement Equivalence

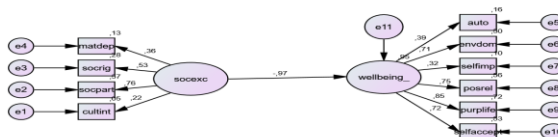
		χ^2	χ^2/df	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA
Configural	Unconstrained	201.481	1.975	.934	0.06	.038
Metric	Measurement weights	241.096	2.043	.918	0.08	.040
Scalar	Measurement intercepts	256.340	2.067	.912	0.08	.040
	Structural covariances	287.952	2.000	.904	0.07	.039

Since the data was normally distributed, a multiple-group analysis based on the structural equation model was performed using the maximum likelihood calculation method to assess household income's moderating effect. Household income groups were classified based on the hunger threshold and poverty threshold. Since 1987, to determine workers' living conditions, the Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (Türk-İş) has researched hunger and poverty thresholds monthly. Therefore, Türk-İş data was used, considering it to be more realistic and reliable in determining the hunger and poverty threshold. According to Türk-İş Research (July 2022), the monthly food expenditure (hunger threshold) required for a family of four to have a healthy, balanced and adequate diet is 6.840 TL. The total amount of other compulsory monthly expenses (poverty threshold) for clothing, housing (rent, electricity, water, fuel), transportation, education, health and similar needs, together with food expenditure, is 22.280 TL.

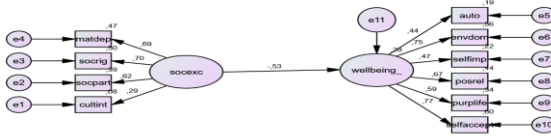
3. Findings

On examining the results of the analysis, it was seen in the path diagram (Figure 1) that social exclusion predicted well-being for people below the hunger threshold ($\beta = -.97$, $p < .01$). It was found that social exclusion explains 95% of the variance in well-being for those below the hunger threshold. Furthermore, social exclusion predicted well-being for those between the hunger and poverty threshold ($\beta = -.53$, $p < .01$); social exclusion explained 28% of the variance in well-being for this group. Finally, it was found that social exclusion also predicted well-being for those above the poverty threshold ($\beta = -.49$, $p < .01$); social exclusion explained 24% of the variance in well-being for those above the poverty threshold.

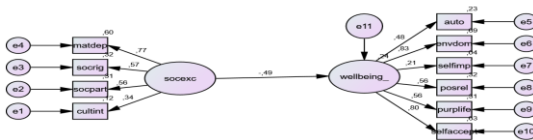
Figure: 1
Results for Household Income Groups
Below Hunger Threshold



Between Hunger Threshold and Poverty Threshold



Above Poverty Threshold



Thus, it was concluded that social exclusion significantly and negatively affected the well-being of all household income groups. Considering the standardised beta coefficients, this effect was higher in those below the hunger threshold. To analyse whether this difference is significant, the critical Z value for household income groups was examined, and it was found that this value was more critical than 1.96 at 95% (2.507 and 2.134). Therefore, it can be concluded that this difference is significant. So, the impact of social exclusion on well-being depends on household income, and this effect is higher for those below the hunger threshold. Hence, H0 was rejected, and H1 was supported.

4. Discussion

Social exclusion is a process that deprives the individual of opportunities in the economic, social, cultural, and political areas of life; it is one of the phenomena that have been emphasised recently. The main risk factors for social exclusion are low income and lack of labour force participation. Byrne (1999) argued that social exclusion is unavoidable in post-industrial capitalist societies due to flexible labour markets and globalisation. Under these conditions, many people are at risk of social exclusion, especially those from low-income households, in today's flexible labour markets.

Social exclusion deprives an individual of opportunities and negatively affects well-being, including the individual's physical, mental, and social well-being. Although income is seen as one of the demographic variables affecting individual well-being (Diener & Ryan, 2009), the relationship between income and well-being has been largely ignored in psychological research.

Therefore, this study aimed to analyse the moderating role of household income in the relationship between social exclusion and well-being. A four-dimensional social exclusion scale was used to measure social exclusion, and a six-dimensional psychological well-being scale was used to measure well-being. A multiple-group analysis based on the structural equation model was conducted to determine this moderating effect. The findings confirmed the moderating role of household income and showed that social exclusion and well-being are negatively correlated. The study's most important finding was a significant and negative relationship between social exclusion and well-being; as social exclusion increases, well-being decreases. This was true for all household income groups. However, the results showed that this effect was higher in those below the hunger threshold. In other words, as social exclusion increases in those below the hunger threshold, there is a more significant adverse effect on well-being.

According to the British Household Panel Survey (1998), a clear relationship existed between income levels, social exclusion, and well-being (cited in Levitas et al., 2007). The Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey (Levitas et al., 2007), which included quality of life and indirect well-being as a dimension of social exclusion, as well as Barnes (2005), who considered well-being as one of the dimensions of social exclusion, concluded that social exclusion was higher. Well-being was low in individuals belonging to low-income groups. According to the European Community Household Panel (ECHP), which focuses on household income, the longer people remain in the low-income group, the greater their risk of becoming permanently excluded, leading to worsening well-being (Atkinson et al., 2005). By associating these with income, Berger-Schmitt and Noll (2000) also provided an apparent account of the relationship between quality of life (indirectly, well-being) and social exclusion. Gordon et al. (2000) concluded that, in the relationship between social exclusion, well-being, and income, the group which is excluded the most and the group with the lowest level of well-being includes those with low-income levels. Bellani and D'Ambrosio (2010) found that the well-being of those who experienced social exclusion was lower by examining the combined effects of income and other risk factors. Bayram et al. (2010) found that income plays a significant role in the relationship between social exclusion and well-being. Purevjav and Rahman (2017) concluded that income is one of the factors affecting the impact of social exclusion on well-being. Dahlberg and Mckee (2018) also concluded that all indicators of social exclusion are negatively correlated with well-being; similarly, low income also has a strong negative correlation with well-being. Hence, all these findings support the results of the present study.

Considering the reasons for social exclusion, household income gains importance because it causes poverty. When social exclusion is evaluated in terms of the relationship

between poverty, it can be said that the concepts of poverty and social exclusion are closely related. Poverty, a result related to distribution, is the inability of individuals to meet their basic needs and is a term used to express an existing situation. Social exclusion, on the other hand, is a disadvantageous multidimensional process including the reduction of participation in society and access to social rights and resources (Silver & Miller, 2006: 58). While some researchers stated that social exclusion is a broad term that includes poverty; others indicated that it is a cause or a consequence of poverty. According to those who see poverty as a part of social exclusion, poverty is the most critical exclusionary element. According to Levitas, who sees social exclusion as a result of poverty, the main reason for social exclusion is household income level (Levitas, 2000); According to Becker (1997), social exclusion refers to a broader concept than poverty and injustice in the distribution of resources, but poverty is the key element of this social exclusion.

When evaluated regarding hunger and poverty threshold, these individuals consume inferior goods and services due to insufficient access to economic resources and household income. Among individuals at risk of social exclusion, the low-income and the poor are among the most prominent risk groups. Therefore, there is likely a negative relationship between social exclusion and household income. Household income is closely related to material deprivation, a dimension of social exclusion. Therefore, household income affects both social exclusion and well-being. The increase in household income decreases the harmful effects of social exclusion on well-being, or the decrease in household income increases the harmful effects of social exclusion on well-being. The higher the household income, the lower social exclusion and the easier it will be to achieve higher well-being. In contrast, the lower household income will negatively affect the perception of social exclusion and the individual's well-being. Thus, it can be concluded that higher household income decreases social exclusion and contributes positively to an individual's well-being by reducing material deprivation.

This study had some limitations. First, the study was conducted in Kocaeli due to cost and time constraints. Thus, the sample may not represent the entire labour force in Türkiye. Second, the study used a quantitative approach, which limited an in-depth examination of the variables under consideration. Besides, this study only examined the moderating effect of household income among all demographic variables examined. More comprehensive results can be obtained when the effects of other variables, such as age, education, and status in the labour market, are discussed. Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the literature by providing a reliable and generalisable perspective on the moderating effect of household income on the relationship between social exclusion and well-being. Future studies can employ a mixed-methods design and include other demographic variables for more robust findings.

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