Support to Syrian refugees in Turkey: The roles of descriptive and injunctive norms, threat, and negative emotions

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This research investigates individual's support for social provisions and rights of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Support is examined in relation to perceived threat of Syrian refugees and negative emotions in combination with the perception of family and friends considering Syrian refugees a threat (negative descriptive social norm) and whether these significant others morally support these refugees (positive injunctive norms). A questionnaire study was conducted among Turkish participants ($N = 565$), and the results show that perception of threat was associated with negative emotions which, in turn, were related to less support to Syrian refugees. Additionally, perception of threat was associated with less support through negative emotions when perceived descriptive norms were strong. Further, perceived injunctive norms were associated with more support to Syrian refugees, but less so when people had stronger negative emotions. These findings suggest that with negative descriptive norms, threat-based negative emotions are associated with less support to Syrian refugees, and that stronger negative emotions make the association between positive injunctive norms and support weaker.

Keywords: descriptive norms, injunctive norms, negative emotions, perception of threat, support to refugees.

In 2019, the number of Syrian refugees reached 5.6 million (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2019a) and 3.6 million of them live in Turkey (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2019b). Public surveys have shown that some Turkish people tend to welcome and help Syrian refugees (Erdoğan, 2014; Konda Research & Consultancy, 2016), but others perceive Syrian refugees as a threat (Konda Research & Consultancy, 2016; Taştan, Haklı, & Osmanoğlu, 2017; Topal, Özer, & Dokuzlu, 2017). Research has indicated that the perception of outgroup threat is associated with less support to refugees and immigrants more generally (Chiricos, Stupi, Stults, & Gertz, 2014; Stansfield & Stone, 2018; Unnever & Cullen, 2012). Yet, questions of why and when exactly perceived threat is associated with less support for refugees remain largely unexplored.

In this study, we investigate among self-identified Turkish citizens the "why" question by examining the mediating role of negative emotions in the association between perceived threat and support for social provisions and rights of Syrian refugees. The "when" question is examined by considering the role of perceived negative descriptive ("what is") and positive injunctive norms ("what ought to be") from one's family and friends in the associations between threat, negative emotions, and support for refugees (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991). We expected the association between threat and negative emotions to depend on perceived descriptive norms, and that the association between positive injunctive norms and support to depend on negative emotions toward Syrian refugees.

Perception of threat and emotions

There is much evidence for the association between perceived outgroup threat and rejection of refugees and immigrants (e.g., Semyenov, Raijman, Yom Tov, & Schmidt, 2004; Stansfield & Stone, 2018; Verkuyten, 2009a). However, research has focussed less on why exactly threat is associated with negative attitudes. One likely reason is that threat elicits negative emotions that influence how people think and act. Studies on people's attitudes toward refugees have found that negative emotions such as anger predict less support to refugee groups and immigrants (Montada & Schneider, 1989; Verkuyten, 2009b).

According to appraisal theories (Ellsworth, 2013; Frijda, 2007; Lazarus, 1991; Roseman, 2013; Scherer, 2009), emotions are reactions to specific situations or events and imply action tendencies (Frijda, 2007;

Roseman & Smith, 2001). People interpret a situation or an event in terms of whether it is harmful or dangerous and whether one is able to cope with it. This cognitive appraisal triggers an emotional experience (Ellsworth, 2013; Moors, 2014) with the related tendency to act (Frijda, 2007; Roseman, 2013). For example, anger toward an outgroup may result in a desire to confront the outgroup by opposing governmental policies that benefit that group (Mackie, Smith, & Ray, 2008).

Perception of threats can elicit specific emotions depending on the threatening outgroup (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Neuberg, Smith, & Asher, 2000), but a particular outgroup can also trigger a range of negative emotions. For instance, an outgroup can be perceived as forming a realistic, symbolic, and security threat and can also evoke feelings of intergroup anxiety (Stephan & Stephan, 1996a, 2000). We examine whether the perception of Syrian refugees as posing a threat to Turkish society is associated with various negative emotions such as anger, annoyance, hatred, fear, and disgust and whether these negative emotions, in turn, are associated with less support for Syrian refugees in Turkey. Thus, we expected negative emotions to mediate the relation between perceived outgroup threat and support for Syrian refugees.

Roles of descriptive and injunctive norms

Feelings of threat and the related negative emotions are likely to play a role in attitudes and behaviours, but so are social norms (Mackie et al., 2008). Norms can have different implications when they are situationally salient (Jacobson, Mortensen, & Cialdini, 2011) and can function, for example, to suppress the expression of prejudicial attitudes (Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002; Crandall, Ferguson, & Bahns, 2013; Paluck, 2009). However, in contrast to research on collective-action tendencies toward refugees and immigrants (e.g., Saab, Harb, & Moughalian, 2017; Schmid, Hewstone, Küpper, Zick, & Tausch, 2014), there is very little research examining whether and how norms are related to responses to refugees (e.g., Schindler & Reese, 2017). In considering normative influences, it is relevant to distinguish between descriptive norms (what is done) and injunctive norms (what ought to be done) because both have separate motivational implications. Thus, for a proper understanding of normative influences, it is important to consider them separately, especially in situations where both might be simultaneously meaningful. Furthermore, we focus on negative descriptive norms and positive injunctive norms. What is commonly done in relation to refugees can be negative whereas what is morally approved tends to be positive. Additionally, we examine the importance of perceived descriptive and injunctive norms of significant others (family and friends) rather than in society in general because Turkey is considered a more collectivistic society in which people tend to rely on family and close friends (Mango, 2004; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmier, 2002).

Descriptive norms describe what most people actually do and, thus, what is the typical or *normal* reaction. These norms provide information about what in a specific situation or toward a particular event is the likely and common reaction and thereby helps to make sense of one's own experiences. When people feel a certain way and their significant others have similar feelings, this provides evidence for the adequacy and appropriateness of their feelings. Descriptive norms provide input for adequate information-processing and personal decision-making (Cialdini et al., 1991; Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990; Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Hence, we argue that the extent to which family and friends are perceived to feel threatened by Syrian refugees has an impact on the negative emotions that one experiences, particularly on the association between one's own perception of threat and negative emotions. More specifically, the feeling of outgroup threat is expected to be more strongly associated with negative emotions when people perceive that more family members and friends also feel threatened by Syrian refugees. In that case, the descriptive norm validates one's own feeling of threat with the related negative emotions, making these normal and understandable: "I feel threatened, and my family and friends also feel threatened, so it is understandable that I have negative emotions."

Injunctive norms do not specify what others actually do but what ought to be done. They refer to rules and beliefs of what constitutes morally (dis)approved conduct and entail the promise of social and moral sanctions. Injunctive norms serve the interpersonal goal of maintaining social relationships (Cialdini & Trost, 1998) and tend to relate to moral issues such as harm and fairness (Haidt, 2013; Turiel, 2002). These norms stipulate what is morally right and wrong, and although they have an all-or-nothing quality (Aramovich, Lytle, & Skitka, 2012; MacCallum, Zhang, Preacher, & Rucker, 2002), their impact in terms of sanctions can be expected to be stronger when more family members and friends subscribe to them. Thus, the injunctive norm to help refugees is probably stronger when a higher number of one's friends and family members consider it a moral duty to help and support refugees. A stronger injunctive norm can be expected to be associated with stronger personal endorsement of support for Syrian refugees.

Negative emotions toward Syrian refugees might undermine the positive impact of injunctive norms. Due to their negative emotions, people cannot live up to the moral demands of injunctive norms. The negative

emotions might overpower their moral concerns and justify their lack of support. Social concerns about one's moral image are taxing, and moral lapses are likely when people feel emotionally involved (Ellemers, 2017). This is more likely for the refusal to support and help someone, which as an omission rather than a commission, may be perceived as less blameworthy compared to actively engaging in harmful and unfair behaviour (Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, & Hepp, 2009).

Refugees in Turkey

Turkey has been a hot spot for refugees for decades, with people arriving mainly from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Syria (Turkish Grand National Assembly, 2018). However, the refugee issue became particularly controversial with the flow of Syrian refugees to Turkey starting in 2011. As Turkey is part of the *1951 Geneva Convention* on the status of refugees, Syrian refugees were not considered refugees in legal terms and hence did not benefit from refugee rights. Yet, as a neighbouring country, Turkey granted temporary protection status to the Syrian refugees with an open-door policy, no forced return to Syria, and an unlimited length of stay in Turkey (Kaya, 2016). Additionally, although refugee camps were built specifically for the Syrian refugees, today 95% of them live in various parts of Turkey, leaving only 5% of the refugees in these camps (Turkish Grand National Assembly, 2018).

With the increasing number of Syrian refugees, debates on their integration and permanent stay in Turkey increased as well. One debate evolved around the question of whether the support provided to Syrian refugees is at the expense of the state support to Turkey's citizens (Taştan et al., 2017). Today, Syrian refugees can work legally, can get treatment at state hospitals and an education at state schools or in temporary education centres, and can establish their own business. Additionally, municipalities organise activities for supporting refugees and provide food, clothing, and blankets. Although the Syrian refugees do not have the right to apply for Turkish citizenship, 30,000 of them benefited from the "exceptional" citizenship right—which is granted to those who made an economic, scientific, or academic contribution in Turkey—and obtained Turkish citizenship (Turkish Grand National Assembly, 2018). In light of these developments, the perception of Turkish people regarding the support given to Syrians tends to be rather negative (İçduygu, 2015). According to a public opinion survey, 56% of the Turkish public indicated that they were not in favour of giving any support to the Syrian refugees, either directly or through a relief foundation (Konda Research & Consultancy, 2016). Public opinion surveys also revealed that a significant percentage of Turkish people had perceived Syrian refugees as a threat. For example, a recent study has shown that 87% of the respondents agreed that unemployment had increased in Turkey after the arrival of Syrian refugees, and 62% agreed that crime had increased (Taştan et al., 2017). Other research that investigates the representation of Syrian refugees on social media has shown that the majority of people view Syrian refugees as a threat to the future and welfare of Turkey (Özdemir & Özkan, 2016).

Method

Participants

The current study was conducted by the research company Optimar in 2015 (May–June). A survey taker administered the paper-and-pencil questionnaire. Respondents participated voluntarily, and it took about 20 to 25 min to complete the survey. This study was conducted with 605 Turkish citizens (43.6% male, 56.4% female). The respondents ranged in age from 18 to 81 years ($M = 39.6$, $SD = 14.4$). Addresses of the respondents were selected by the Turkish Statistical Institute from the following cities, which vary in terms of the ratio of Syrian refugees to each city's population: Istanbul (33.4% of participants), Antalya (22.3%), Gaziantep (13.7%), Adana (13.4%), Samsun (8.9%), and Kilis (8.3%). Samsun and Antalya have a low number of Syrian refugees (0.1% and 0.5%, respectively), Adana and İstanbul have a somewhat higher ratio of Syrian refugees (2.5% and 2.6%, respectively), and Gaziantep and Kilis have a relatively high number of Syrian refugees (14% and 41%, respectively) (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2017; Turkish Statistical Institute, 2016). In total, 87.6% of the participants ethnically self-identified as Turks, 6.9% as Kurds, 1.5% as Arabs, 0.8% as Zaza, and 3.1% from other ethnic groups.[1]

Measures

Perception of threat was measured with the following items based on previous research (Stephan, Diaz-Loving, & Duran, 2000; Stephan & Stephan, 1996b): "Because of the Syrian refugees in Turkey, the people living in Turkey have more difficulties in finding a job;" "Because Syrian refugees are taking jobs away from the people living in Turkey, unemployment will increase in Turkey;" "Because of Syrian refugees the people living in Turkey have more difficulties in finding or renting a house;" "I worry about the rise of stealing, begging, and attacking of the people living in Turkey;" and "I worry about Syrian refugees spreading diseases." All items

were rated on 5-point agree–disagree scales of 1 (*certainly not agree*) to 5 (*certainly agree*), and an average score of these items was computed, α = .85.

Negative emotions were measured by asking participants about their feelings toward Syrian refugees using the following emotion terms: "Anger," "Annoyance," "Hatred," "Fear," and "Disgust." All items were rated on 5-point scales of 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*), and an average score of these items was computed, α = .85.

The dependent variable—support to Syrian refugees—was measured with five items: "Syrian refugees should be accepted as citizens of Turkey;" "Syrian refugees can open Syrian stores, restaurants, real state agencies, and other business;" "Syrian refugees need to be able to reside in Turkey permanently;" "Syrian refugees need to be able to legally work in Turkey;" and "Children of Syrian refugees should be allowed to go to regular schools." All items were rated on 5-point scales of 1 (*very unlikely*) and 5 (*very likely*), and an average score of these items was computed, α = .86.

Descriptive norms were measured by asking participants how many of their friends and how many of their family members think that Syrian refugees in Turkey "Are working illegally in Turkey" and "Are affecting Turkish economy badly." These four items refer to negative views about Syrian refugees and were rated on 5-point scales of 1 (*none*) to 5 (*all of them*), α = .86.

Injunctive norms were measured by asking participants how many of their friends and how many of their family members think that Syrian refugees in Turkey "Ought to be helped;" "Their children ought to be allowed to go to regular schools;" and "Ought to be able to benefit from state hospitals" on 5-point scales of 1 (*none*) to 5 (*all of them*). An average score of these six items was computed, α = .91.

The items for the perceived descriptive norms and for perceived threat were similar in content; therefore, we examined whether these items formed two separate factors. A factor analysis with maximum likelihood extraction and oblimin rotation showed that the descriptive norm items loaded on the first factor (>.43; on the second factor highest load = .29) that explained 44.29% of the variance. The perception of threat items loaded on the second factor (>.51; on the first factor highest load = .03) that explained 24% of the variance.

Further, we examined whether the items for perceived descriptive norms and injunctive norms loaded on two separate factors. This was found to be the case, with the descriptive norm items loading on the first factor (>.53; on the second factor highest load = .25) that explained 43.72% of the variance and the injunctive norms loading on the second factor (>.65; on the first factor highest load = .11) that explained 28.62% of the variance.

Last, because the items for injunctive norms and those measuring participants' own support to Syrian refugees were similar in content, we examined their empirical distinctiveness. Injunctive norms loaded on the first factor (>.56; on the second factor highest load = .29) that explained 51.23% of the variance. Support to Syrian refugees' items loaded on the second factor (>.53; on the first factor highest load = .31) that explained 18.54% of the variance.

Results

Descriptive findings

Table 1 shows the means and *SD*s of each construct as well as their intercorrelations. One-sample *t*-tests indicated that perceived threat and the perception of descriptive norms are above the midpoint of the scales, $t(598) = 30.69$, $p < .001$; $t(589) = 16.98$, $p < .001$, respectively, and that negative emotions, injunctive norms, and support to Syrian refugees are below the midpoint of the scales, $t(600) = -17.10$, $p < .001$; $t(591) = -4.12$, $p < .001$; and $t(597) = -.19.19$, $p < .001$, respectively. While perceived threat was positively correlated with descriptive norms and with negative emotions, it was negatively correlated with support for Syrian refugees. Descriptive norms were also positively correlated with negative emotions and negatively associated with support for Syrian refugees. Injunctive norms were negatively correlated with perceived threat and positively with descriptive norms. Negative emotions were negatively correlated with injunctive norms as well as with support for Syrian refugees. Perceptions of

Table 1
Correlations, Means, and SDs of the Main Constructs

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
1. Perception of threat	–	–	–	–	–	4.08	.09
2. Descriptive norms	.30**	–	–	–	–	3.80	1.14
3. Injunctive norms	−.39**	.06	–	–	–	2.81	1.12
4. Negative emotions	.49**	.17**	−.42**	–	–	2.25	1.07
5. Support to Syrian refugees	−.59**	−.24**	.50**	−.45**	–	2.23	.99

Note. **$p < .01$.

both descriptive and injunctive norms were not significantly associated.

Descriptive norms and support to Syrian refugees

To test our model for descriptive norms and following recent recommendations for (moderated) mediation analyses (Yzerbyt, Muller, Batailler, & Judd, 2018), we first used stepwise regression analyses to examine the path from perception of threat to negative emotions, and then the indirect path from negative emotions to support for Syrians.

First, in predicting negative emotions toward Syrian refugees, we added in Step 1 age, gender, cities (dummy variables, with Istanbul as the reference category), and ethnicity (Turkish reference category) as demographic control variables. In Step 2, we added perceived threat and the perception of descriptive norms, and in Step 3, the predicted interaction between threat and descriptive norms. As shown in Table 2, perception of threat predicts negative emotions, and this association was moderated by descriptive norms. As expected and as shown in Figure 1, simple slope analysis showed that the relationship between perceived threat and negative emotions is stronger when descriptive norms are stronger (+1 *SD*) *B* = .78, *SE* = .08, *p* < .001, 95% confidence interval (CI) [0.625,
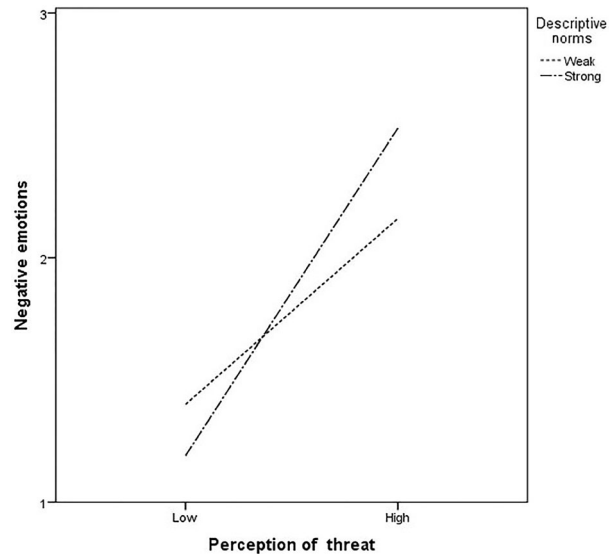

Figure 1 Interaction effect between perception of threat and descriptive norms on negative emotions for weak descriptive norms (1 *SD* below the mean) and strong descriptive norms (1 *SD* above the mean).

0.927], as compared to weaker descriptive norms (−1 *SD*) *B* = .44, *SE* = .06, *p* < .001, 95% CI [0.327, 0.561].

Subsequently, we tested the full moderated mediation model by using the process macro (Model 7) with 10,000 bootstraps (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007). The results indicated that higher perceived threat is associated with more negative emotions, *B* = .61, *SE* = .05, *t* = 12.23, *p* < .001, 95% CI [0.507, 0.702], and that stronger negative emotions are associated with lower support to Syrian refugees, *B* = −.18, *SE* = .03, *t* = −5.34, *p* < .001, 95% CI [−0.245, −0.113]. The indirect statistical effect of perceived threat on support to Syrian refugees through negative emotions was significant, −.03, as the 95% CI [−0.050, −0.012] does not contain zero. The direct effect of perceived threat on support to Syrian refugees was also significant, *B* = −.50, *SE* = .04, *t* = −11.93, *p* < .001, 95% CI [−0.583, −0.419]. This means that there is partial mediation through negative emotions and that there are other factors that also explain the association between perception of threat and support to Syrian refugees. As expected, the mediation relationship was qualified by a significant interaction between perception of threat and descriptive norms, *B* = .15, *SE* = .04, *t* = 3.53, *p* < .001, 95% CI [0.066, 0.233]. When descriptive norms are strong (+1 *SD*), the indirect statistical effect of perceived threat on support to Syrian refugees through negative emotions is stronger *B* = −.14, *SE* = .03, CI [−0.203, −0.083], than when descriptive norms are weak (−1 *SD*) *B* = −.08, *SE* = .02, CI [−0.115, −0.047].

Table 2
Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Negative Emotions toward Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Variables	Step 1 β (SE)	Step 2 β (SE)	Step 3 β (SE)
Age	−.01 (.00)	−.02 (.00)	−.02 (.00)
Gender	−.10 (.09)*	−.04 (.08)	−.04 (.08)
Non-Turkish	−.05 (.13)	−.00 (.12)	−.01 (.12)
Antalya	−.21 (.12)***	−.11 (.11)	−.09 (.11)*
Adana	−.13 (.14)**	.02 (.14)	.04 (.14)
Samsun	−.26 (.16)***	−.19 (.14)***	−.19 (.14)***
Kilis	.00 (.17)	.02 (.15)	.03 (.15)
Gaziantep	−.02 (.14)	.02 (.13)	.05 (.13)
Perception of threat	–	.45 (.06)***	.48 (.06)***
Descriptive norms	–	.05 (.04)	.04 (.04)
Perception of Threat × Descriptive Norms	–	–	.13 (.05)**
R^2	.09	.29	.30
ΔR^2	.09	.19	.02
ΔF	7.32***	77.00***	11.81**

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Injunctive norms and support to Syrian refugees

We conducted a regression analysis predicting support for Syrian refugees. In Step 1, we again added age, gender, cities, and ethnicity as demographic control variables. In Step 2, we added negative emotions and injunctive norms, and in Step 3, the interaction between both measures. As shown in Table 3, stronger perceived injunctive norms were associated with higher support whereas more negative emotions were associated with lower support for Syrian refugees. Additionally, negative emotions moderated the association between injunctive norms and support to Syrian refugees. As shown in Figure 2, simple slope analysis indicated that the relationship between injunctive norms and support to Syrian refugees is weaker when negative emotions are stronger, $(+1\ SD)$ $B = .28$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.402, 0.559], as compared to lower negative emotions, $(-1\ SD)$ $B = .48$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.195, 0.365].
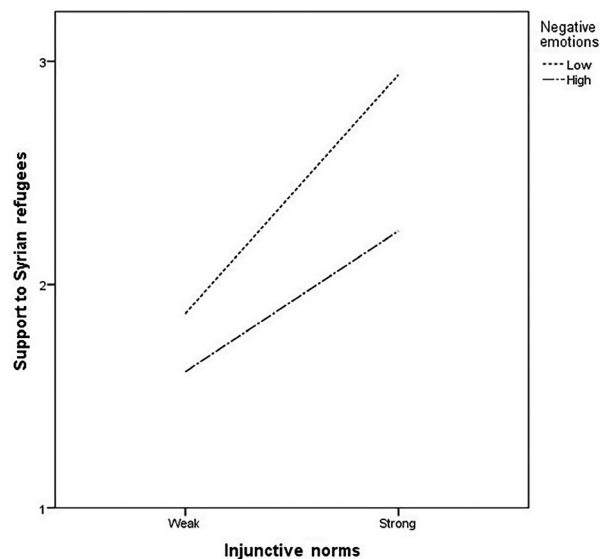
Alternative models

We tested three alternative models to further investigate our predictions about the roles of descriptive and

Figure 2 Interaction effect between injunctive norms and negative emotions on support to Syrian refugees for low negative emotions (1 *SD* below the mean) and high negative emotions (1 *SD* above the mean).

injunctive norms in the association between perceived threat, negative emotions, and support for Syrian refugees.

First, we used Model 8 (Preacher et al., 2007) to examine whether descriptive norms not only moderate the association between perceived threat and negative emotions but also the direct association between perceived threat and support to Syrian refugees. Results showed that the latter interaction was not significant, $B = .05$, $SE = .03$, $p = .126$. Second, we tested if descriptive norms would moderate the association between negative emotions and support to Syrian refugees; the interaction effect also was not significant, $B = .02$, $SE = .03$, $p = .517$. Third, we examined if injunctive norms would moderate the association between perceived threat and negative emotions; this interaction was not significant, $B = -.08$, $SE = .04$, $p = .062$. Furthermore, injunctive norms also did not moderate the direct association between perceived threat and support to Syrian refugees, $B = -.05$, $SE = .03$, $p = .120$; Model 15 (Preacher et al., 2007).

Discussion

The relatively high number of refugees residing in Turkey has led to debates about the extent to which there is societal support for Syrian refugees. While some Turkish people try to help Syrian refugees (Konda Research & Consultancy, 2016), others are more hostile and reluctant to do so (İçduygu, 2015). The aim of this

Table 3

Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Support to Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Variables	Step 1 β (SE)	Step 2 β (SE)	Step 3 β (SE)
Age	−.02 (.00)	−.01 (.00)	−.01 (.00)
Gender	.02 (.08)	−.06 (.06)**	−.07 (.06)*
Non-Turkish	.12 (.12)**	.09 (.09)**	.08 (.09)*
Antalya	.35 (.10)***	.22 (.08)***	.21 (.08)***
Adana	.38 (.12)***	.41 (.10)***	.42 (.10)***
Samsun	.20 (.14)***	.13 (.12)***	.13 (.12)***
Kilis	.09 (.15)*	.11 (.12)**	.18 (.10)***
Gaziantep	.12 (.12)**	.18 (.10)***	.18 (.10)***
Negative emotions	–	−.22 (.03)***	−.25 (.03)***
Injunctive norms	–	.45 (.03)***	.44 (.03)***
Injunctive Norms × Negative Emotions	–	–	−.11 (.03)***
R^2	.18	.48	.49
ΔR^2	.18	.30	.01
ΔF	15.56***	164.88***	12.96***

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

study was to examine why and when Turkish people support Syrian refugees. The why question was examined in terms of perceived threat and the related negative emotions, and the when question in terms of the moderating roles that descriptive and injunctive norms might play in the association of threat-based negative emotions and support to Syrian refugees.

Regarding *why* perceived threat was associated with less support to Syrian refugees, our findings show that this association was partly explained by negative emotions. This is in line with previous research demonstrating that perception of threat is associated with more negative emotions toward outgroups (Montada & Schneider, 1989; Verkuyten, 2009b) and that negative emotions are associated with less support to refugees and other minority groups (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Neuberg, et al., 2000). This pattern of findings has suggested that the cognitive appraisal of Syrian refugees—as spreading diseases, affecting Turkish economy and social peace negatively—is associated with negative emotions that in turn are related to lower willingness to support Syrian refugees. However, the fact that there remains a significant direct effect of perception of threat on support to Syrian refugees indicates that negative emotions are not only responsible from this association. For example, negative beliefs and stereotypes about Syrian refugees might also be important for the association between perceived threat and support to Syrian refugees.

Regarding *when* perceived threat is associated with less support to Syrian refugees, we found that stronger descriptive norms were not associated with negative emotions but rather strengthened the association between perceived threat and negative emotions. This pattern of findings is consistent with research showing that descriptive norms provide information about the appropriateness of one's own feelings and help to provide input for decision-making (Cialdini et al., 1991, 1990; Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Thus, the extent to which family and friends are perceived to feel threatened by Syrian refugees was not associated with one's own emotional reactions but rather moderated the association between perceived threat and negative emotions. For the Turkish participants, feelings of threat from Syrian refugees seem to be validated and normalised by the perception that family and friends also feel threatened by Syrian refugees. This perception confirms the appropriateness of the Turkish participants' own negative feelings toward Syrian refugees.

We also examined the possibility that perceived injunctive norms—whether family and friends think that one ought to help and support Syrian refugees—are associated with people's support, and this was found to be the case. The stronger the perceived injunctive norms, the more strongly people supported Syrian refugees. This suggests that people's own support is influenced by what

friends and family find morally right, but it might also, in part, indicate that people believe that their friends and family have the same moral views as they do. However, perceived injunctive norms were less strongly associated with support when participants had more negative emotions toward Syrian refugees. This is an important finding, which indicates that negative emotions toward refugees make it more difficult to follow the positive injunctive norms of significant others.

Limitations

Some limitations should be considered. First, data were collected through a two-stage cluster sampling method, which means that it is not possible to generalise the results to the Turkish population. However, we collected data from six cities that vary in terms of the ratio between the hosting population of the city and the Syrian refugees who are being hosted, and we found theoretically derived associations between the constructs that were examined. Future studies could apply a longitudinal design and use more representative data. Additionally, the focus was on attitudes toward support for Syrian refugees in Turkey, and future research could investigate the same model for attitudes toward other refugee groups and in other countries.

Second, we did not consider societal norms, positive emotions, and moral concerns that theoretically could also be relevant for people's responses to refugees. For example, not only significant others but also the perception of what is commonly done (descriptive norms) and commonly approved (injunctive norms) in Turkish society might be important for people's emotional reactions to Syrian refugees and their willingness to support them. Furthermore, the role of positive descriptive norms (i.e., information about helping initiatives) and whether these motivate people to support refugees or rather lead to social loafing could be studied (Schmidt & Reese, 2017). Additionally, future research could examine support for refugees in relation to other factors and processes such as intergroup contact, humanitarian considerations, and empathy as well as also education, religiosity, and political orientation.

Conclusion

This study is the first to assess the associations between perceptions of threat, negative emotions, descriptive and injunctive norms, and support to Syrian refugees in a key geographical context that hosts the highest number of Syrian refugees. Our aim was to examine when and why perceptions of threat are associated with less support for Syrian refugees. The findings make three relevant contributions to the literature. One is that negative

emotions are partly responsible for the association between perceived threat and less support to Syrian refugees. Second, the perception of negative descriptive norms can normalise one's own perception of threat and its association with one's negative emotions. Third, the perceived moral norms of family and friends are important for people's support of refugees, but one's negative emotions toward Syrian refugees reduce the importance of injunctive norms for support. In light of these findings, a policy priority for civil society organisations and political campaigns trying to improve the relations between Turks and Syrian refugees is to address the threat perceptions of Turkish people about Syrian refugees. Additionally, people are sensitive to positive injunctive norms, meaning, for example, that policies emphasising humanitarian concerns might stimulate people to care about the fate of the innocent victims of conflict and disaster (e.g., Nickerson & Louis, 2008; Yitmen & Verkuyten, 2018). However, to be effective, these policies should address the negative emotions (anger, annoyance, disgust) that people can have because of feeling threatened by Syrian refugees.

Conflict of Interest

Both authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Note

1 Part of this data was used in two other papers. However, the constructs examined in the current article have not been analysed and presented earlier.

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