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How Does the Sense of Closeness to God Affect Attitudes toward Refugees in Turkey? Multiculturalism and Social Contact as Mediators and National Belonging as Moderator

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Abstract: Turkey has been the country hosting the highest number of refugees globally with the immigration of Syrians after the civil war in Syria. There have been no major problems between Turks and Syrians in the past ten years. Although Syrians have a financial burden of 71 billion USD to the Turkish state, Turkish society has not reacted significantly due to common religious, cultural, and humanitarian values. This study was conducted with 1743 individuals of different age groups, and it tried to understand the effect of Turkish society's spirituality in attitudes and behaviors towards Syrian refugees. This relationship was investigated with regard to whether the multiculturalism and contact frequency acted as mediators and national belonging acted as moderator. Gender, age, education, family income, marital status, and whether participants have Syrian neighbors were used as control variables. As a result of the analysis, it was found that the spirituality of the Turkish people was associated with their attitudes towards Syrian refugees, with the mediator effect being multiculturalism and social contact and the moderator effect being national belonging in this relationship.



Citation: Koçak, Orhan. 2021. How Does the Sense of Closeness to God Affect Attitudes toward Refugees in Turkey? Multiculturalism and Social Contact as Mediators and National Belonging as Moderator. *Religions* 12: 568. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080568>

Academic Editor: Hans Zollner

Received: 10 June 2021

Accepted: 21 July 2021

Published: 23 July 2021

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Keywords: migration; negative attitudes; Syrian refugees; spirituality

1. Introduction

Refugees are among the most vulnerable people because they lack access to many basic rights. They are excluded as a result of society's stigmatization and marginalization, as well as their inability to access health, education, and economic possibilities (Henry et al. 2020; Marshall 2015; Miller et al. 2010). With the start of the civil war in Syria in 2011, about 4 million Syrian refugees came to Turkey. An open-door policy was implemented and most Syrians were housed in temporary accommodation centers (Akar and Erdoğan 2019). Basic humanitarian aid such as health and education is provided in the name of "temporary protection" for Syrian refugees (Abdulkerim et al. 2021). In the country and northern Syria, the Government has provided shelters and humanitarian aid such as food, education, health, and household goods for Syrian refugees (Gibárti 2021). The total cost for Turkey, which hosts the most refugees in the world, approached 71 billion USD in the first months of 2021 (Eraslan 2021).

The Government expected that the state and native people would embrace refugees by stressing spirituality, which has the potential to influence Turkish public opinion (Demirtaş 2021). However, interestingly, the importance of religion in the individual and social lives of Syrian refugees in Istanbul has begun to weaken, and their desire to adapt to Turkish society, escape the pressures of the neighborhood, and understand religion correctly at educational institutions enhanced their secularization tendencies (Akkır 2019). Although there has been an increase in the number of non-believers in Turkish society and those who believe in different religions (Kenton 2019), Islam is still mostly a common value in both societies. The fact that most Turkish and Syrian citizens commonly share the same beliefs may foster a positive attitude towards refugees. However, surprisingly, it was seen that the positive feelings towards Armenians, Jews, and Greeks who have different beliefs and are

living as residents in Turkey are more than those towards current Muslim refugees (Yitmen and Verkuyten 2018). Therefore, a spiritual view rather than believing in the same religion may be effective in the behavior towards out-groups in Turkish society. As a result, it is expected that spirituality, as a coping mechanism, may have an essential role in political and interpersonal interactions with refugees so that mutual acceptance and integration can be easier (Yang and Fry 2018; Kocak et al. 2021; Lyck-Bowen 2020).

The research was based on the vertical-horizontal theory developed by Ellison (1983). The theory explains that spirituality is effective in people's socialization and individual feelings, thoughts, and relationships. It has two dimensions, a vertical relationship directly with God, and horizontal, a person's relationship with himself, others, and his environment (Carroll 2010). This research examined how a sense of closeness to God affected negative attitudes toward Syrians. It was discovered that there is a negative connection between feeling close to God and negative attitudes toward Syrians. Multiculturalism and contact frequency were found to be mediators in this relationship, with national belonging acting as a moderator. As a result, it was discovered that a sense of closeness to God increases the multiculturalism and frequency of contact, decreasing negative attitudes and behaviors toward Syrians. Furthermore, it was found that a sense of national belonging had a significant moderating impact on the relationship between a sense of closeness to God and negative attitudes of Turks toward Syrians.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1. Spirituality and the Belief in God

Traditionally, the concept of closeness with God has been understood as a religious framework. However, belief in God is sometimes understood outside the boundaries of religion. In both approaches, belief in God is a fundamental principle that forces or influences the individual to do something. In this sense, spirituality in human life is based on this principle which plays a central role in the individual's life. According to the vertical-horizontal theory developed by Ellison (1983), spirituality has a vertical dimension that is effective in relations with God, a source of supreme values that influence an individual's life. The God of the individual adds meaning and purpose to all life and the lifestyle of the individual. The meaning and purpose of life, which is revealed by the individual's belief in God and spirituality, can affect relations with other people (Dyson et al. 1997). Spirituality is a personal experience of the divine, whether understood conventionally as God or a higher authority or more secularly as unity with the larger cosmos (Gall et al. 2011). Therefore, faith in God has an important place in spirituality. The belief that there is a creator and that that creator maintains order in the universe is vital in spirituality (Hardt et al. 2012).

Some argue and oppose that spirituality and religion are related. Spirituality somehow differs from religion. There is some debate whether spirituality and religion are related. Spirituality somehow differs from religion. However, it can be common in terms of belief in God (Hardt et al. 2012). Spirituality may even be tied to religion for some people, but it may not be for others. It focuses on living in a way that is directly linked to the divine and is not limited to religious involvement (van Dierendonck and Mohan 2006). In many studies, spirituality, like religion, has been used as a coping mechanism (Unterrainer et al. 2014; Roberto et al. 2020; Desrosiers and Miller 2007; Moberg 2011). Interactions between spirituality and religion have often existed in this regard. This relationship has also enhanced the interconnections between religion and spirituality (Li and Shun 2016; Tomás and Rosa 2021; Lucchetti et al. 2020; Koenig 2012; Gozdzia 2002; Joseph et al. 2006).

Spirituality is a prerequisite for religion, but religion is not a prerequisite for spirituality (Ekşi and Nesrullah 2021). Spirituality might include a religious component, but it can also transcend religious and cultural borders. Ellison (1983) vertical-horizontal theory describes the horizontal dimension of spirituality as an individual's relationship with themselves, others, and their environment (Carroll 2010), and this approach could be regarded as the social-psychological factor. It is distinguished by self-transcendence, which can result in

faith, meaning to life and the pursuit of purpose, connecting with others, inner serenity, peacefulness, harmony, increasing physical and mental health, hope, and a sense of well-being (Coyle 2002; Hodge 2000; Lucchetti et al. 2020; Dyson et al. 1997). A strong spiritual connection can boost a person's sense of satisfaction in life while also enabling adaptation to difficulties (Delgado 2005; Koenig 2008). Spirituality contributes to individuals' physical and mental health (Miller and Thoresen 1999; Astrow et al. 2001; Coyle 2002). Spirituality has a protective, preventive, and therapeutic effect on physical and mental health (Borman and Dixon 1998; Perera and Frazier 2012; Humphreys 2000). It also plays an essential role in rehabilitating the disabled and the morale and motivation of their families providing their treatment (Treloar 2002) and in reducing the tendency to violence (Ekşi and Nesrullah 2021).

Many studies on the positive effect of both religiosity and spirituality in coping with problems were mentioned. However, it is likely to cause harm when different meanings are attributed to spirituality, deviated from the truth, and exploited by authorities (McLaughlin 1994; Juergensmeyer 2002). Every faith may have a fundamentalist advocate. Some traditions or beliefs may tend to interpret negative events resulting from sin or God's choice (Samuel 1994). While there may be a religious understanding that sees the mentally ill as the devil's work (Cornah 2006; Kim-Goh 1993), the spirituality of individuals can be shaped according to race, belief, and a certain region, which despises women or excludes those who are not like them. However, these radical approaches are the exception and difficult to generalize. However, many people have left the churches as a result of clergies' sexual abuse (McLaughlin 1994). With the abuse of spirituality by some authorities, individuals may fail to realize the spiritual, sacred, and psychological abuse. In other words, spiritual authorities may manipulate their followers for their own sovereignty through systematic indoctrination, put them under pressure, and control them and get them to do whatever they want (Steven 1996). Therefore, there may be the enslavement of people in the name of spirituality. Afterward, there is a risk that such groups may turn into highly motivated and organized terrorist organizations (Voll 2015; Pew Research 2014; Andre 2015; Juergensmeyer 2002).

In some studies, it is emphasized that spirituality has sources other than religion. There is a tendency that spirituality replaces religion or is an alternative to religion in the modern era (Obadia 2017; Moberg 2011). Spirituality is sometimes used to refer to more particular, private, mixed aspects acquired from other traditions rather than religion, which is viewed as authoritative. This approach embraces modernity and globalism, freedom of choice, and cultural and traditional harmony (Heelas and Woodhead 2005). According to Alici (2018), some people turn to spirituality for the dynamism of this world rather than the afterlife, a more egalitarian view of life rather than religion's hierarchical structure, to move away from dogma for having different experiences and to benefit from all religions rather than a single religion. According to Giordan (2009), spirituality includes or originates from the holy and the emotions, the physical, and the sexual, and it examines the individual holistically. It can also be achieved through nature, music, art, philosophical belief, or friend and family relationships (Astrow et al. 2001). The rise of spirituality is supported by the weakening of traditional moral norms that have emerged with globalization (Houtman and Aupers 2007). In psychological studies, spirituality has been used together with religion and has become more widespread with humanist universalism. Spirituality is also used in ideological issues to support utopian ideals of dialogue and peace (Obadia 2017; Moberg 2011). Spirituality is also widely accepted in non-monotheistic religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. It has even spread globally through activities such as yoga and Qigong (Veer 2016). In the modern era, mysticism has also been closely associated with the concept of spirituality (Klein et al. 2016; Holm 2009). However, it can also be based on religion or other phenomena beyond the visible or the invisible. In mystical spirituality, people often hold beliefs but are not affiliated with a religious institution or movement (King 2005).

2.2. Spirituality, Social Contact, and Multiculturalism

Spirituality has an impact on many aspects of life which can be explained by the horizontal approach of [Ellison \(1983\)](#) theory. In this view, spirituality has the potential to improve interpersonal interactions, foster empathy for others and multiculturalism, promote a sense of solidarity and mutual trust among individuals and groups, improve the quality of life and well-being, and provide a sense of purpose and meaning to activities in both business and social life ([Karakas 2010](#); [Corpuz 2020](#); [Demirci and Ekşi 2018](#); [Carroll 1998](#); [Dyson et al. 1997](#)). Most importantly, it can develop individuals' coping skills against the sudden developments and difficulties they face in life ([Rippentrop et al. 2005](#); [Roberto et al. 2020](#)).

On the one hand, spirituality can lead to individualization and being apolitical ([Mirza 2014](#)). Even for some individuals and groups, spirituality means being isolated from life and living a secluded life ([Boynton 2016](#); [Klass 2021](#)), but this is more common in women ([Ishara 2018](#)). Moreover, solitariness is praised in Indian tradition and it is seen as a necessary prerequisite for spiritual health and wisdom ([Prabhu 2020](#)). On the other hand, spirituality makes individuals more social, interactive, empathic, extroverted, and open to differences with the idea that people come from the same divine source ([van Dierendonck and Mohan 2006](#)). Spirituality and social life are strongly linked in many ways ([Daaleman et al. 2001](#)). The social component of spirituality is defined as one of the primary components that constitute spirituality's social element, such as being united with other people and God. Spiritualism's potential and social nature provide a theoretical foundation for the relationship with social inclusion and well-being ([Yoon and Lee 2007](#)). Therefore, individuals' feelings of closeness to God can increase interactivity with people, the acceptance of differences, and participation in society ([Çetin 2019](#)).

There are groups worldwide that have exclusionary attitudes and behaviors toward other faiths or races based on their spirituality ([Arnold and Taylor 2018](#); [Thomas 2021](#); [Butt and Byman 2020](#)). Some fundamentalist, right-wing, white supremacist Christians in the United States and Europe, for example, feel their faith justifies anti-Black, anti-Jewish, and anti-Muslim discrimination ([Burris et al. 2000](#); [Todd 2010](#); [Dobratz 2001](#); [Koehler 2016](#)). As a result of an armed attack on Muslims during Friday prayers in New Zealand, 50 deaths and 48 injuries resulted. It was understood that the attacker committed the attack based on his perception of belief ([Besley and Peters 2020](#)). However, there is often a positive relationship between spirituality and multiculturalism because spirituality usually requires accepting people without discrimination based on race, religion, language, ethnicity, nationality, and prejudice. In this respect, those with strong spirituality can embrace more differences and be open to multiculturalism ([Nagai 2008](#)). Spirituality also positively affects the coming together of different cultures and their efforts towards the same goal ([Farran et al. 2003](#)). Due to the presence of immigrants with different religious and ethnic backgrounds in countries such as America and Australia, it is seen that the majority of the people are accustomed to multiculturalism and different faiths and behave accordingly ([Susan 2011](#); [Halafoff et al. 2020](#)). Although the culture of the Syrians who came after 2011 is partially different, the fact that their religion is the same has accelerated the mutual adaptation process. According to the literature, these hypotheses were constructed.

Hypotheses 1 (H1). *The sense of closeness to God has a positive association with multiculturalism.*

Hypotheses 2 (H2). *The sense of closeness to God has a positive association with social contact frequency.*

2.3. Spirituality and Attitudes towards Refugees

Refugees are generally seen as someone else or the other in every society. Refugees benefit less from fundamental rights, economic opportunities, and social benefits ([Wauters and Lambrecht 2008](#); [Marshall 2015](#); [Miller et al. 2010](#)). After the violence and trauma refugees experience in their home country, their exclusion in the host country further impairs their identity and physical and mental health ([Betancourt et al. 2015](#); [Colic and](#)

Walker 2003; Im et al. 2017; Henry et al. 2020). Racism and prejudice against refugees have become widespread in many developed host countries (Mestheneos and Ioannidi 2002). Although marginalization or otherization decreases over time with harmonization policies, it may increase with the effect of some economic, cultural, and sociological factors. However, the process of acceptance and adaptation can be more straightforward with the help of some elements such as spirituality and religion by which meaning to life can be added (Yang and Fry 2018; Dyson et al. 1997). As revealed by the individual's faith in God and spirituality, the value and purpose of life can have an impact on the individual's relationships with others (Captari et al. 2018; Ribeiro et al. 2020; Gallardo-Peralta 2017; Dyson et al. 1997). It has been observed that people manage their troubles better by using the coping power of spirituality and religion, especially in challenging times (Şimşir et al. 2017; Vitorino et al. 2018).

In countries where refugees are present, their interactions with host communities often happen with mutual reservations (Colic-Peisker 2005) because cultural differences, insufficient information between the two communities, and possible prejudices can make it difficult to get closer and contact (Hangartner et al. 2019). However, spirituality and multiculturalism, as universal values, may facilitate reconciliation when disparities are faced. With this understanding, it will be easier for the refugees and the host population to eliminate prejudices and live together by increasing their contact in the same area (Crisp and Turner 2009; Cowling et al. 2019; Knappert et al. 2021). According to the literature, these hypotheses were constructed.

Hypotheses 3 (H3). *The sense of closeness to God has a reducing impact on negative attitudes towards refugees.*

Hypotheses 4 (H4). *Multiculturalism has a lessening impact on negative attitudes towards refugees.*

Hypotheses 5 (H5). *Social contact frequency has a lessening impact on negative attitudes towards refugees.*

Hypotheses 6 (H6). *There is a mediation effect in the correlation between the sense of closeness to God and negative attitudes towards refugees through (i) multiculturalism and (ii) social contact frequency.*

2.4. National Belonging as the Moderator

National belonging is often explained in terms of ethnic ancestry and civic commitment (Wakefield et al. 2011). However, civic commitment is more effective in multi-ethnic and multicultural societies. Due to the prevalence of multi-ethnic and multiculturalism in Turkish society, at least as much as ethnic ancestry, civic commitment is included in national belonging feelings. Spirituality, multiculturalism, and nationalism are intertwined concepts due to historical and religious reasons in Turkish society (Onar 2009). Spiritual and religious, intellectual and cultural, linguistic, and traditional aspects and similarities in art and ethnic affinity, inherited from Ottomans and the Prophet Muhammed era, have led to an easier harmony between Turks and Syrians (Shaherhawasli and Güvençer 2021; Grine et al. 2013). During the Ottoman period, Jews, Christians, and Muslims lived together for centuries by forming their laws according to the norms of their religion (Gara 2017; Idriz 2020; Horii 2018; Çiçek 1993; Barkey 2007).

As citizens, Jews, Greeks, Armenians, and Turks live together with differences in peace in today's Turkey. In research, positive attitudes towards Armenians, Jews, and Greeks who practice different religions and live in Turkey are higher than current Muslim refugees (Yitmen and Verkuyten 2018). This is based on a multicultural understanding with a spiritual, historical, and religious background brought about by living together with societies with different beliefs for centuries. However, some fundamentalist, right-wing, and white supremacist organizations in developed Europe and America or the Middle East and Africa have exclusionary or destructive attitudes and behaviors against different races, colors, and religions (Thomas 2021; Besley and Peters 2020; Koehler 2016).

The recommendations of Islam regarding the acceptance of people of different faiths and ethnic backgrounds support coexistence. In this sense, some verses from the Qur'an, which are seen as a guide by Muslims, contribute to this process. The verses in the Qur'an, such as "to you is your religion, and to me is my religion" (Qur'an 2001, vol. 109, p. 6) and "there shall be no compulsion in religion: the right way is now distinct from the wrong way. Anyone who denounces the devil and believes in GOD has grasped the strongest bond; one that never breaks. GOD is Hearer, Omniscient" (Qur'an 2001, vol. 2, p. 256) make it easier for members of different religions to live together. In addition, in another verse in the Quran, it is emphasized that differences come from creation and should be accepted:

"O people, we created you from the same male and female, and rendered you distinct peoples and tribes, that you may recognize one another. The best among you in the sight of GOD is the most righteous. GOD is Omniscient, Cognizant". (Qur'an 2001, vol. 49, p. 13)

In other words, the message is to know each other but not exclude other societies. For this reason, nationalist ideology and conservative and religious people have generally been close to each other (Haynes 2010; Cetinsaya 1999), and an important majority defines themselves as both nationalist and conservative in Turkey. (Atacan 2005; Toprak 2005; Avci 2005)

It is vital in terms of social acceptance and tension that most Syrian refugees, who exceed 4% of Turkey's population, live together with the Turkish community outside of camps (Murat et al. 2017). In a study with university students, most participants stated that they are pleased with the presence of their Syrian classmates as they can learn a lot from them. They also stated that having the same culture, spirituality, religion, and culinary culture increased their closeness (Ergin 2016). The fact that Syrians who took refuge in Turkey are Muslims facilitated the integration between the two communities (Hoffstaedter 2017; Maqul et al. 2020). Although there are occasional conflicts between Syrians and Turks, mutual tolerance prevails thanks to shared values (Kocak et al. 2021). In addition, the current government highlighting the Islamic brotherhood and the approach of being Ansar given to the people of Medina who embraced the Prophet Muhammad and his friends who migrated from Mecca to Medina in the history of Islam strengthened the mutual positive view (Ghanbari 2019; Daniş and Nazlı 2019; Erdoğan 2019). Despite concerns about Syrians in Turkish society, the level of "social acceptance" remains extremely high. In other words, Turkish society does not reflect some of the negativities and troubles experienced by the Syrians, and Syrians feel happy and safe and are not exposed to discrimination (Erdoğan 2020) since spirituality, multiculturalism, and national belonging are positively associated in Turkish society (Onar 2009; Cetinsaya 1999). According to the literature, these hypotheses were constructed.

Hypotheses 7 (H7). *There is a moderation impact of national belonging in the effect of the sense of closeness to God on (i) multiculturalism and (ii) social contact frequency.*

Hypotheses 8 (H8). *There is a moderation impact of national belonging in the effect of the sense of closeness to God on negative attitudes towards refugees.*

Hypotheses 9 (H9). *There is a moderation impact of national belonging in the effect of (i) multiculturalism and (ii) social contact frequency on negative attitudes towards refugees.*

Hypotheses 10 (H10). *National belonging moderates the mediated effect of closeness to God via (i) multiculturalism and (ii) social contact frequency on negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees.*

As illustrated in Figure 1, direct, mediation, and moderation impact analyses were performed on each path to evaluate these hypotheses. Following that, the role of the multiculturalism and social interaction frequency in the influence of a sense of closeness to God on negative attitudes was investigated. Finally, the moderating influence of national belonging on each direct effect was investigated. All direct, mediation, and moderation

analyses on the model depicted in Figure 1 included age, gender, education, and income level as control variables.

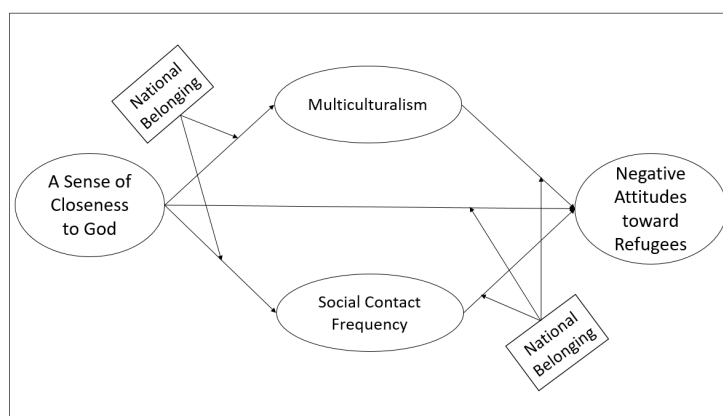


Figure 1. Research conceptual model.

3. Method

3.1. Study Design, Participants, and Procedure

The purpose of this study was to understand the effects of Turkish people's sense of closeness to God on negative attitudes about Syrian refugees. Furthermore, the mediation effect of the multiculturalism and social contact frequency, as well as the moderating effect of national belonging on this effect, were investigated. When the literature on refugees was surveyed, it was discovered that the impact of the host people's spirituality and sense of closeness to God on their approach to refugees had not been thoroughly investigated. Furthermore, the impact of Turks' multiculturalism, social contact frequency, and national belonging on Syrians were considered in this relationship.

The research was cross-sectional and a convenience sample method was used (Aron and Aron 2002). Harman's single factor test was employed to determine whether a common factor biases findings and the score was less than 50% (Podsakoff et al. 2012). As a result, common method bias has no effect on the data and outcomes. This study was designed to assess the results after relationships and impacts were established rather than to form a generalization.

The study was conducted with 1743 individuals from different age groups using the online survey method in different cities of Turkey. In the study, the participants were determined by a simple random sampling method and participated voluntarily. The survey was conducted between 10 April and 28 April 2021. Before answering the survey questions, the aims and method of the research were explained to the participants and their consent was obtained. The identity information of the participants remained anonymous as they were not requested. Each participant was allowed to fill out the questionnaire only once and answer or stop answering the questionnaire whenever they wanted. Confidentiality and privacy of the research data were ensured, and it was carried out in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration guidelines.

3.2. Data Analyses

Data were collected using the Survey Monkey online survey program, saved to MS Excel for cleaning, and then imported into IBM SPSS 25. Descriptive analyses were used to estimate the frequencies, averages, and standard deviations for demographics and scales. Correlations and regressions were carried out following the factor analysis of all variables to ensure construct validity. Multiple regression analyses were performed by defining the sense of closeness to God as an independent variable, negative attitudes as a dependent variable, and contact frequency and multiculturalism as mediator variables. The national belonging variable was used as a moderator. Age, gender, education, and family income were used as control variables in the analyses. The SPSS 22 program was

used for direct regression and correlation analyses, and PROCESS Macro (Model 59) was used for mediation and moderation analysis. (Hayes and Rockwood 2020). A simple slope test was used to illustrate the results of moderation analyses and two-way interactions (Dawson 2014). The level of statistical significance was set at $\alpha > 95\%$.

3.3. Measures

Sociodemographic characteristics were asked in the personal information form included in the study's questionnaire. There were questions about gender, age, education, and income levels of participants. Age was a continuous variable, whereas gender, education level, and income level were categorical variables.

The sense of closeness to God was asked with two items taken from the religious attitude scale developed by Ok (2011). The Religious Attitude Scale was developed specifically for the Islamic society, using two separate samples with university students. Cronbach Alpha scores in two separate samples were 0.81 and 0.91. As a result of EFA and CFA factor analysis, four factors were confirmed as cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and relational. Only a relational factor was used in this study. The relational factor, which measures the sense of closeness to God, consisted of two statements: "I feel that God is very close to me" and "I think God helps me in difficult times". Each item was evaluated on a five-point scale (1 certainly not agree to 5 certainly agree). In this study, the factor's Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was determined as 0.918.

Multiculturalism was assessed with three items taken from two previously conducted studies (Levin et al. 2012; Yitmen and Verkuyten 2018). Three items were used exactly: "Refugee parents must encourage their children to retain the culture and traditions of their homeland," "A society with different ethnic and cultural groups can better address its societal problems", and "We should help ethnic and cultural minorities to preserve their cultural heritage in Turkey." Each item was evaluated on a five-point scale (1 certainly not agree to 5 certainly agree). Cronbach Alpha coefficient was determined to be 0.713 in this research.

National belonging was measured by three items that have been used in previous studies which focus on Turkish identity (Çelebi et al. 2014; Yitmen and Verkuyten 2018): "I am proud to be a citizen of Turkey", "Being a citizen of Turkey is an important part of who I am", and "I strongly feel that I am a citizen of Turkey." Each item was evaluated on a five-point scale (1 certainly not agree to 5 certainly agree). In this study, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient was determined as 0.933.

The social contact frequency scale was originally developed by Islam and Hewstone (1993). The Turkish adaptation of the scale was made by Akbaş (2010). The scale was evaluated using a 5-point Likert format, with five items, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Higher scores indicate more frequent contacts. In the scale, items were used such as "How often do you contact Syrian refugees as neighbors?" and "How often do you keep in touch with Syrian refugees as a close friend?" to assess the frequency of contact with Syrian refugees in formal and informal settings. In this study, the internal reliability of the scale was determined as $\alpha = 0.822$.

The Attitudes Toward Syrian Refugees Scale, developed by Sunata et al. (2016), was used to assess Turkish attitudes toward Syrian refugees. The scale includes eight items such as "It bothers me to see Syrian refugees in the city center", "I believe Syrian refugees have increased the crime rate", "Giving citizenship rights to Syrian refugees bothers me", and "Syrian refugees should be deported" to assess citizens' attitudes based on symbolic and realistic threat perceptions of individuals. The scale is a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being "completely disagree" and 5 being "completely agree". The higher the score, the more negative the opinions about Syrian refugees. The internal reliability of the scale was determined to be $\alpha = 0.919$ in this study.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Analyses

The descriptive statistics of the demographic data and scales used in the study were shown in Table 1. The frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviations of gender, education, and income levels, and only the mean and standard deviations of age and factors are displayed in Table 1. Of the participants, 68.4% were female and 31.4% were male. The mean age was 32.18, with a standard deviation of 13.35. It was understood that 10.3% of the participants were elementary, 6.1% middle school, 19.2% high school, 61.8% university, and 2.6% Master's or Ph.D. graduates. Those with low-income level were determined as 13%, lower middle 33.8%, middle 27.1%, upper middle 15.3%, and highest 10.8%.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

| | <i>f</i> | % | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|--------------------------|----------|------|----------|-----------|
| Gender | | | | |
| Female | 1196 | 68.6 | | |
| Male | 547 | 31.4 | | |
| Age | | | 32.18 | 13.35 |
| Education Level | | | 3.4 | 1.017 |
| Elementary | 180 | 10.3 | | |
| Middle School | 106 | 6.1 | | |
| High School | 335 | 19.2 | | |
| University | 1077 | 61.8 | | |
| Master's or PhD | 45 | 2.6 | | |
| Income Level | | | 2.77 | 1.179 |
| Low | 227 | 13 | | |
| Lower middle | 589 | 33.8 | | |
| Middle | 473 | 27.1 | | |
| Upper middle | 266 | 15.3 | | |
| Highest | 188 | 10.8 | | |
| Closeness to God | | | 3.975 | 0.96384 |
| Multiculturalism | | | 2.5938 | 0.57455 |
| Social contact frequency | | | 1.3481 | 0.63346 |
| National belonging | | | 4.049 | 1.07715 |
| Negative attitudes | | | 2.7078 | 1.16955 |
| Total | 1743 | 100% | | |

4.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed to examine the construct validity of the scales. First, the scales used in the research were converted into a measurement model, and a five-factor measurement model was created. In order to test the goodness of fit indices of the measurement model, the cut-off values in the studies of Kline (2016) and Schumacker and Lomax (2010) were taken as reference. These values are CMIN/DF < 5, GFI > 0.90, CFI > 0.95, NFI > 0.90, IFI > 0.90, and RMSEA < 0.05.

The fit index values in the initial version of the model were within the cut-off values (CMIN/DF = 4.814; GFI = 0.952; CFI = 0.967; NFI = 0.959; IFI = 0.967; RMSEA = 0.047). However, it was determined that the values would be better with the improvement of the model fit values. For this purpose, variables that would increase the fit were determined, and two new covariances were created for those with high covariance among residual values. After the revisions, the test was repeated and the constructed model fit well with the theoretical model (CMIN/DF = 3.754; GFI = 0.964; CFI = 0.977; NFI = 0.969; IFI = 0.977; RMSEA = 0.040). Path coefficients of all observed variables in the model were statistically significant.

4.3. Correlation Analyses

As seen in Table 2, both demographic variables and factors were included in the analysis. A positive correlation was found between age and sense of closeness to God and national belonging, whereas a negative correlation was found with multiculturalism ($r = 0.157$, $r = 0.174$, $r = -0.059$; $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$, respectively). Females had a higher sense of closeness to God and multiculturalism than males, whereas males had higher social contact frequency and negative attitudes ($r = -0.113$, $r = -0.051$, $r = 0.101$, $r = 0.147$; $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.01$, respectively). There was a positive association between education level, family income, and multiculturalism, but a negative association with a sense of closeness to God and national belonging was discovered ($r = 0.188$, $r = 0.051$, $r = -0.202$, $r = -0.169$; $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.01$, respectively). A negative association was found between family income and a sense of closeness to God and a positive association with multiculturalism and social contact frequency ($r = -0.102$, $r = 0.057$, $r = -0.048$; $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.05$, respectively). Positive relations between the sense of closeness to God and national belonging, multiculturalism, and social contact frequency, and negative relations with negative attitudes were found ($r = 0.555$, $r = 0.288$, $r = 0.130$, $r = -0.180$; $p < 0.01$, respectively). Positive relationships were identified between national belonging and multiculturalism, as well as negative correlations with negative attitudes ($r = 0.212$, $r = -0.087$; $p < 0.01$, respectively). Positive correlations between multiculturalism and social contact frequency and negative correlations with negative attitudes were discovered ($r = 0.181$, $r = -0.396$; $p < 0.01$, respectively). A negative association was discovered between the frequency of social contact and negative attitudes ($r = -0.339$; $p < 0.01$). According to these relational results, hypotheses H1 and H2 were accepted.

Table 2. Correlation analyses.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 Age | 1 | | | | | | | |
| 2 Gender f = 1, m = 2 | 0.162 ** | 1 | | | | | | |
| 3 Education | −0.525 ** | −0.032 | 1 | | | | | |
| 4 Family income | 0.034 | 0.117 ** | .188 ** | 1 | | | | |
| 5 CtoGod | 0.157 ** | −0.113 ** | −0.202 ** | −0.102 ** | 1 | | | |
| 6 NB | 0.174 ** | −0.032 | −0.169 ** | −0.017 | 0.555 ** | 1 | | |
| 7 MC | −0.059 * | −0.051 * | 0.051 * | 0.057 * | 0.288 ** | 0.212 ** | 1 | |
| 8 SCF | 0.036 | 0.101 ** | 0.013 | 0.048 * | 0.130 ** | 0.021 | 0.181 ** | 1 |
| 9 NA | 0.004 | 0.147 ** | −0.027 | 0.007 | −0.180 ** | −0.087 ** | −0.396 ** | −0.339 ** |

Note: CtoGod = closeness to God, NB = national belonging, MC = multiculturalism, SCF = social contact frequency, NA = negative attitudes.

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

4.4. Direct Effects

A multiple regression analysis was used to examine the study's direct effects and hypotheses, as seen in Table 3. Three different models were adopted to examine the effect of independent variables on dependent variables. In Model 1, it was understood that multiculturalism diminishes as age decreases and multiculturalism rises as education, family income, sense of closeness to God, and national belonging increase ($B = -0.004$, $B = 0.034$, $B = 0.038$, $B = 0.162$, $B = 0.047$; $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.001$, $p < 0.01$, respectively). As seen in Model 2, it was found that males had a higher effect on the frequency of social contact than females, the sense of closeness to God had a positive effect, and national belonging had a negative effect ($B = 0.154$, $B = 0.130$, $B = -0.047$; $p < 0.001$, $p < 0.001$, $p < 0.05$, respectively). In Model 3, it was discovered that men exhibit more negative attitudes toward refugees than women ($B = 0.401$, $p < 0.001$). Multiculturalism and social contact frequency had a lessening impact on negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees ($B = -0.675$, $B = -0.535$; $p < 0.001$, $p < 0.001$, respectively). According to these direct effect results, hypothesis H3 was refused, and H4 and H5 were accepted.

Table 3. Main regression effects on MC, SCF, and NA.

| Variable | Model 1: MC | | | Model 2: SCF | | | Model 3: NA | | |
|---------------------|-------------|--------|--------|--------------|--------|--------|-------------|--------|--------|
| | B | SE | p | B | SE | p | B | SE | p |
| (Constant) | 1.676 | 0.108 | <0.001 | 0.622 | 0.124 | <0.001 | 4.955 | 0.215 | <0.001 |
| Age | −0.004 | 0.001 | 0.002 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.410 | −0.004 | 0.002 | 0.056 |
| Gender f = 1, m = 2 | −0.014 | 0.029 | 0.631 | 0.154 | 0.033 | <0.001 | 0.401 | 0.054 | <0.001 |
| Education | 0.034 | 0.016 | 0.029 | 0.029 | 0.018 | 0.104 | −0.042 | 0.029 | 0.152 |
| Family income | 0.038 | 0.011 | 0.001 | 0.023 | 0.013 | 0.075 | 0.026 | 0.021 | 0.226 |
| CtoGod | 0.162 | 0.017 | <0.001 | 0.130 | 0.019 | <0.001 | −0.042 | 0.032 | 0.184 |
| NB | 0.047 | 0.015 | 0.001 | −0.047 | 0.017 | 0.005 | 0.018 | 0.027 | 0.516 |
| MC | | | | | | | −0.675 | 0.045 | <0.001 |
| SCF | | | | | | | −0.535 | 0.039 | <0.001 |
| F | | 35.72 | | | 11.70 | | | 75.66 | |
| p | | <0.001 | | | <0.001 | | | <0.001 | |
| R ² | | 0.110 | | | 0.039 | | | 0.259 | |

Note: CtoGod = closeness to God, NB = national belonging, MC = multiculturalism, SCF = social contact frequency, NA = negative attitudes.

4.5. Mediation Analyses

In mediation analysis, it is necessary to have a statistically significant relationship between the dependent and independent variables and the mediating variable (Hayes and Rockwood 2020). Therefore, as seen in Table 3, a significant positive effect of the dependent variable sense of closeness to God on the mediating variables multiculturalism and social contact frequency was determined. Afterward, it was found that the mediating variables, multiculturalism and social contact frequency, had a significant negative effect on the dependent variable, negative attitudes towards Syrians. Therefore, the effect of a sense of closeness to God on negative attitudes through multiculturalism and social contact frequency was significant. Accordingly, thanks to the mediating effects of multiculturalism and social contact frequency, the impact of a sense of closeness to God in reducing negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees is further increased, as seen in Table 4. In addition, the direct effect of a sense of closeness to God on negative attitudes towards Syrians became not significant in mediation analysis. Therefore, it was seen that the indirect relationship between a sense of closeness to God and negative attitudes towards Syrians via multiculturalism and social contact frequency was fully mediated. According to these mediation results, hypothesis 6 was accepted.

Table 4. Total, direct, and indirect regression analysis on negative attitudes.

| Unstandardized Effect | | | | | SE | LLCI | ULCI | | |
|--|--------------------------------|-----|---|----|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total effect of the sense of closeness to God on NA | | | | | −0.2211 | 0.0348 | −0.2893 | −0.1529 | Sig. |
| Direct effect of the sense of closeness to God on NA | | | | | −0.0423 | 0.0319 | −0.1048 | 0.0202 | N. Sig. |
| Path | Unstandardized Indirect Effect | | | | SE | LLCI | ULCI | | |
| CtoGod | > | MC | > | NA | −0.1093 | 0.0146 | −0.1390 | −0.0825 | Sig. |
| CtoGod | > | SCF | > | NA | −0.0695 | 0.0111 | −0.0919 | −0.0487 | Sig. |

Note: CtoGod = closeness to God, MC = multiculturalism, SCF = social contact frequency, NA = negative attitudes.

4.6. Moderation Analyses

All direct effects were subjected to moderation analyses using the national belonging variable, as depicted in Figure 1. For this purpose, interaction variables with national belonging and a sense of closeness to God, multiculturalism, and social contact frequency were generated. In the interaction effects, shown in Table 5, while the effect of the sense of closeness to God and the national belonging interaction variable (CtoGod X NB) on social contact frequency was insignificant ($B = 0.024$, $p > 0.05$), its effects on multiculturalism and negative attitudes were significant ($B = 0.037$, $B = -0.083$; $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.001$, respectively). The impact of the interactive variable generated between multiculturalism and national

belonging (MC X NB) on negative attitudes was not statistically significant ($B = 0.008, p > 0.05$). The interaction between the frequency of social contact and national belonging (SCF X NB) had a statistically significant influence on negative attitudes ($B = -0.056, p < 0.05$). According to these moderation results, hypothesis H7 (i) was accepted, (ii) was refused; H8 was accepted; and H9 (i) was refused, (ii) was accepted.

Table 5. Interaction effects on MC, SCF, and NA.

| Variable | Model 1: MC | | | Model 2: SCF | | | Model 3: NA | | |
|---------------------|-------------|--------|--------|--------------|--------|--------|-------------|--------|--------|
| | B | SE | p | B | SE | p | B | SE | p |
| (Constant) | 1.513 | 0.119 | <0.001 | 0.514 | 0.136 | <0.001 | 5.282 | 0.231 | <0.001 |
| Age | −0.004 | 0.001 | 0.002 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.400 | −0.005 | 0.002 | 0.038 |
| Gender f = 1, m = 2 | −0.015 | 0.029 | 0.608 | 0.154 | 0.033 | <0.001 | 0.403 | 0.054 | <0.001 |
| Education | 0.036 | 0.016 | 0.021 | 0.030 | 0.018 | 0.089 | −0.047 | 0.029 | 0.103 |
| Family income | 0.036 | 0.011 | 0.001 | 0.022 | 0.013 | 0.092 | 0.033 | 0.021 | 0.123 |
| CtoGod | 0.192 | 0.019 | <0.001 | 0.149 | 0.022 | <0.001 | −0.116 | 0.036 | 0.002 |
| NB | 0.052 | 0.015 | <0.001 | −0.044 | 0.017 | 0.010 | 0.009 | 0.028 | 0.734 |
| MC | | | | | | | −0.660 | 0.046 | <0.001 |
| SCF | | | | | | | −0.524 | 0.039 | <0.001 |
| CtoGod X NB | 0.037 | 0.011 | 0.001 | 0.024 | 0.013 | 0.062 | −0.083 | 0.022 | <0.001 |
| MC X NB | | | | | | | 0.008 | 0.022 | 0.715 |
| SCF X NB | | | | | | | −0.056 | 0.025 | 0.024 |
| F | | 32.31 | | | 10.54 | | | 57.68 | |
| p | | <0.001 | | | <0.001 | | | <0.001 | |
| R2 | | 0.115 | | | 0.041 | | | 0.268 | |

Note: CtoGod = closeness to God, NB = national belonging, MC = multiculturalism, SCF = social contact frequency, NA = negative attitudes.

As seen in the correlation analysis, a high positive association was detected between the sense of closeness to God and national belonging. In the mediation analysis made with PROCESS Macro, moderation analysis with national belonging was performed simultaneously. According to the moderated mediation analysis results, shown in Table 6, it was understood that those with low national belonging had low mediation values of multiculturalism and social contact frequency. However, those with high national belonging had high mediation values. In both direct and indirect effects, those with high national belonging had a more reducing effect of a sense of closeness to God on negative attitudes towards Syrians. According to these moderated mediation results, hypothesis H10 was accepted.

Table 6. Direct and indirect effects of closeness to God on negative attitudes.

| Conditional Direct Effects of CtoGod on NA | | | | | Unstandardized | SE | LLCI | ULCI |
|--|-------------|----|----------|-----------|----------------|--------|---------|---------|
| Low | | NB | | −1.0772 | −0.0294 | 0.0322 | −0.0925 | 0.0336 |
| Average | | NB | | 0.0000 | −0.1158 | 0.0364 | −0.1872 | −0.0443 |
| High | | NB | | 0.9473 | −0.1917 | 0.0496 | −0.2889 | −0.0944 |
| Indirect Effects of CtoGod on NA (Moderated mediation) | | | | | | | | |
| NB | Independent | | Mediator | Dependent | Unstandardized | SE | LLCI | ULCI |
| Low | CtoGod | > | MC | > NA | −0.1032 | 0.0166 | −0.1379 | −0.0729 |
| Av. | CtoGod | > | MC | > NA | −0.1266 | 0.0158 | −0.1594 | −0.0968 |
| High | CtoGod | > | MC | > NA | −0.1463 | 0.0222 | −0.1918 | −0.1042 |
| Low | CtoGod | > | SCF | > NA | −0.0541 | 0.0114 | −0.0787 | −0.0332 |
| Av. | CtoGod | > | SCF | > NA | −0.0782 | 0.0123 | −0.1035 | −0.0547 |
| High | CtoGod | > | SCF | > NA | −0.1032 | 0.0188 | −0.1420 | −0.0677 |

Note: CtoGod = closeness to God, NB = national belonging, MC = multiculturalism, SCF = social contact frequency, NA = negative attitudes.

As a result of the moderation analyses carried out with national belonging, the significant values are shown with graphics in Figures 2 and 3. According to Figure 2a, it was

seen that as the sense of closeness to God levels off, the levels of multiculturalism increase in those with a high national belonging increase more than in those with low national belonging. In other words, it was understood that national belonging was in the same direction with the sense of closeness to God and multiculturalism.

The moderation effect of national belonging in the effect of a sense of closeness to God on negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees was analyzed. According to Figure 2b, it was seen that as the sense of closeness to God levels of those with a high national belonging increase, the levels of negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees decrease more than those with low national belonging. It was discovered that people who felt a high feeling of national belonging and a sense of closeness to God had less negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees.

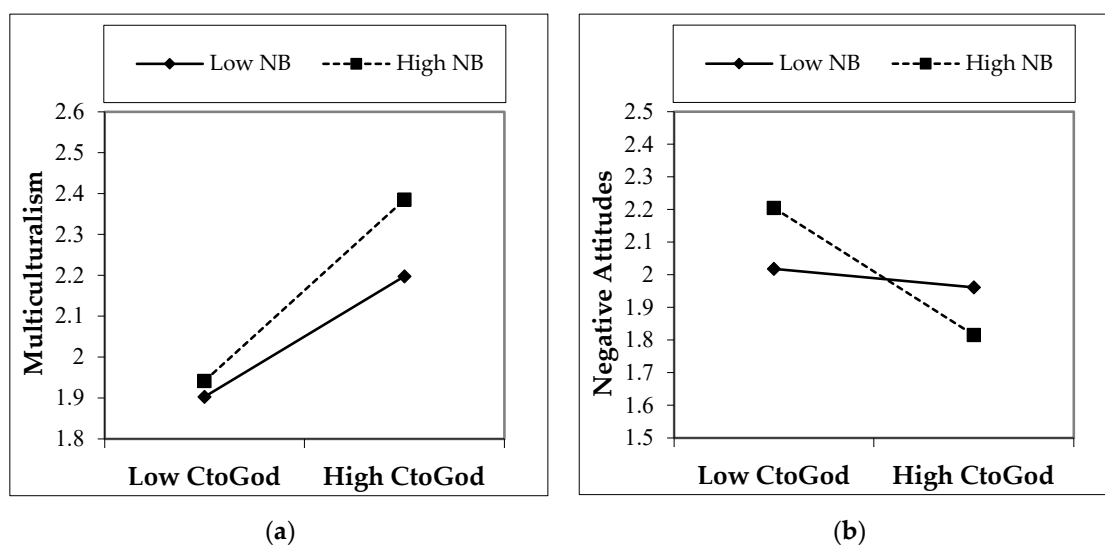


Figure 2. Interaction effect of CtoGod and NB on multiculturalism (a) and negative attitudes (b).

The moderation effect of national belonging in the effect of social contact frequency on negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees was analyzed. According to Figure 3, it was seen that as the social contact frequency levels of those with a high national belonging increase, the levels of negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees decrease more than those with low national belonging. It was found that people who have a high feeling of national belonging and social contact frequency had less negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees than those who have a low sense of national belonging.

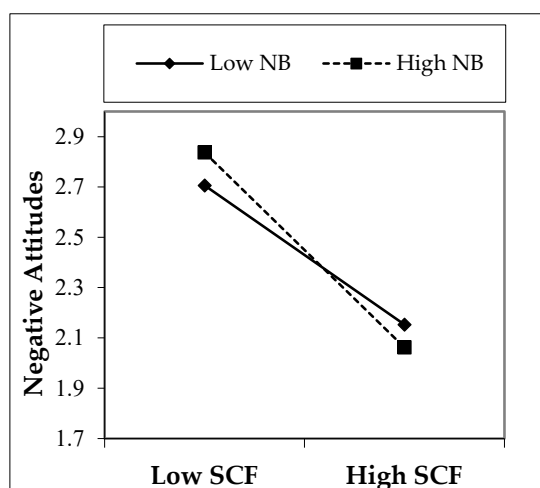


Figure 3. Interaction effect of SCF and NB on negative attitudes.

5. Discussion

Spirituality and religious belief and their domain of influence have been controversial areas throughout history. However, the influence of spirituality and religious belief on human thoughts and behavior has always existed. In addition, spirituality interacts with non-religious elements such as nature, music, art, philosophical belief, friendships, and family (Obadia 2017). That is why the current research was founded on the vertical-horizontal theory developed by Ellison (1983) to explain the two sides of spirituality. The theory is based on the world and the hereafter and their relationship, which influence the views of humanity. It has two dimensions: vertical, which is an individual's relationship with God, and horizontal, which is a person's interaction with himself, others, and his environment. Sometimes two dimensions can be interwoven when individuals give good or bad direction to themselves and the world with the influence of transcendent realities. In this case, the horizontal dimension usually reflects the vertical dimension (Carroll 2010). In this study, the effect of the sense of closeness to God on negative attitudes towards Syrians was investigated in Turkey. In this relationship, the mediation effects of multiculturalism and social contact frequency, and the moderation effects of national belonging were analyzed. According to the results, hypotheses H1, H2, H4, H5, H6, H7(i), H8, H9(ii), and H10 were accepted, whereas H3, H7(ii), and H9(i) were refused.

5.1. Spirituality, Multiculturalism, and Social Contact

According to the findings, a sense of closeness to God has a positive relationship with multiculturalism. It was seen that the sense of closeness to God and multiculturalism support each other. Spirituality necessitates the acceptance of everyone regardless of race, religion, language, ethnicity, nationality, or prejudice (Van Der Walt and Klerk 2015). Those with a high spirituality can welcome more diversity and be more receptive to multiculturalism in this regard (Nagai 2008). Spirituality also has a good impact on the coming together of various cultures and their efforts to achieve a common objective (Farran et al. 2003). Moreover, a positive association was found between the sense of closeness to God and social contact frequency, which was supported by the findings from the literature. With the belief that all people come from the same divine source, spirituality makes people more social, engaging, empathic, outgoing, and receptive to differences (van Dierendonck and Mohan 2006). In many ways, spirituality and social life are inextricably interwoven (Daaleman et al. 2001; Yoon and Lee 2007). Individuals' feelings of faith in God can thereby promote engagement with others, understanding of diversity, and community involvement (Çetin 2019). However, it was understood from the literature that spirituality could turn people into those who do not accept different beliefs, races, colors, and societies (Klass 2021; Boynton 2016; Koehler 2016; Besley and Peters 2020). According to the theory, the vertical and horizontal dimensions of spirituality can be intertwined and affect each other (Ellison 1983). Some spiritual approaches make people closed to life in line with their beliefs, prevent them from socializing, and do not allow them to interact with out-groups. Therefore, spirituality also may lead to introversion, excluding different races, religions, and cultural approaches.

5.2. Spirituality, Attitudes towards Refugees, and Mediations

The direct impact of a sense of closeness to God on negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees was not statistically significant in the study. Since the sense of closeness to God leads to an increase in people's multiculturalism and communication with others, and thus causes a decreasing effect on negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees. It was determined that the effects of multiculturalism and social contact frequency on negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees were negative. The current literature supports the findings (Carroll 1998; Corpuz 2020; Karakas 2010; Nagai 2008). Having multiculturalism and interacting with others reduces many prejudices, exclusions, and stigmatizations against others (Farran et al. 2003; Susan 2011; Cowling et al. 2019; Knappert et al. 2021). In studies investigating the attitudes of spirituality and religion towards accepting differences,

it was understood that some religious movements exclude others (Barringer et al. 2013; Bohman and Hjerm 2014).

By the horizontal dimension in Ellison's theory, spirituality can promote social contacts, multiculturalism, solidarity, and confidence. The literature supports this approach (Carroll 1998; Karakas 2010; Corpuz 2020; Daaleman et al. 2001). However, the way people now interpret life has also impacted spirituality by avoiding physical contact, preferring digital contact and individualization. Furthermore, some spiritual practices, like seclusion or isolation, go against acculturation and integration. As such, these preferences could sometimes produce marginalization (Klass 2021; Boynton 2016; Mirza 2014).

This study showed that the effect of the sense of closeness to God on negative attitudes towards refugees is explained by multiculturalism and social contact. When the mediating variables enter the model, it was seen that the direct effect of the sense of closeness to God becomes statistically insignificant. As seen in the conceptual model (Figure 1), the sense of closeness to God was positively associated with multiculturalism and social contact. Conversely, multiculturalism and social contact had a negative correlation with negative attitudes towards refugees. In today's global world, cultures and societies are increasingly converging. Therefore, being against other cultures and societies will be self-denial of the individual. Since being open to different cultures will increase communication frequency, prejudices will decrease, empathy will be established, mutual acceptance will rise, and negative attitudes towards refugees will diminish. Therefore, strong spirituality and the sense of closeness to God will increase people's multiculturalism and interaction, resulting in a reducing effect on negative attitudes towards refugees.

5.3. National Belonging as the Moderator

In the study, moderation effects of national belonging on direct effects were analyzed. The moderating effect of national belonging between the sense of closeness to God and social contact frequency was insignificant, whereas it was significant on multiculturalism and negative attitudes. Between multiculturalism and negative attitudes, the moderating effect of national belonging was not statistically significant. However, it was statistically significant between the frequency of social contact and negative attitudes. It was also understood that the feelings and approaches of national belonging and multiculturalism, social contact frequency, and a sense of closeness to God support each other positively. The most striking aspect of this study is that those with high national belonging also have high multiculturalism and low negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees. In other words, having a high national belonging will not cause the exclusion of other societies and especially refugees in Turkish society (Onar 2009). Positive relationships were found in some studies between national belonging and negative attitudes towards refugees (Bourhis and Dayan 2004; Verkuyten and Brug 2004). However, in the current study, a negative association was revealed. Religious, cultural, and historical reasons can be cited as the reasons for this approach. In this sense, societies with different ethnicities, religions, and cultures have lived together with Turkish society for centuries (Grine et al. 2013; Barkey 2007; Gara 2017; Horii 2018; Idriz 2020). Historically, there has been no fundamental contradiction between religion (Islam) and nationalism in Turkish society in general (Cetinsaya 1999). Those who reject this approach are the exception. Therefore, today, religious and nationalists can easily cooperate in Turkey. However, this relationship may be different in other societies. For example, in many societies, having a certain religious or spiritual affiliation can lead to the exclusion of different cultures, races, colors, and religions. There are some studies in the literature to support this (Thomas 2021; Besley and Peters 2020; Koehler 2016).

The study found that low, average, and high levels of national belonging affected negative views towards Syrian refugees via the sense of closeness to God and mediator variables. According to the moderated mediation analysis results, people with low national belonging had low multiculturalism and social contact frequency mediation values. Those with a strong sense of national belonging, on the other hand, had high mediation values. Those with a strong sense of national belonging had a stronger direct and indirect effect of

a sense of closeness to God on negative attitudes about Syrian refugees. Furthermore, as the level of national belonging increases, the effect of reducing negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees rises via mediator variables. Eventually, since national belonging has a positive association with spiritual feelings, the negative attitudes of those with high national belonging towards refugees also decrease in Turkey.

6. Limitations

This study was conducted only for Syrian refugees. Since Syrians have a shared history, tradition, culture, and religion with the Turks, the positive view may increase. For this reason, studies should be conducted to measure the attitudes of Turkish society towards non-Muslims and different societies. The study was carried out when the number of COVID-19 cases was at its peak, and the pandemic's economic and social adverse effects were at the highest level. Conducting a new study in a period when the effect of the pandemic is over and free from negative effects will be more meaningful in terms of seeing the point of view of the Turks in a normal period. In addition, a similar study should be conducted with Syrian refugees to understand the feelings and thoughts of Syrian refugees towards Turkish society as well. Furthermore, it was discovered that there are insufficient scales in research for refugees, and those that are available have deficiencies. Therefore, developing new scales to support quantitative studies on refugees will contribute to future academic studies.

7. Conclusions and Some Implications

The study was conducted with 1743 Turkish people in different cities in Turkey, was designed as cross-sectional, and a convenience sampling procedure was employed. The study investigated the effect of the sense of closeness to God on negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees through multiculturalism and social contact frequency. In addition, the moderation effect of national belonging on the relationships between the independent, mediator, and dependent variables was investigated. To this end, direct, indirect, and moderation analyses were conducted. It was found that a sense of closeness to God had a significant effect on multiculturalism and social contact frequency. In addition, multiculturalism and social contact frequency had a significant impact on negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees. Furthermore, national belonging had a moderating effect between a sense of closeness to God and multiculturalism, and negative attitudes. Moreover, in the relations between social contact frequency and negative attitudes, national belonging had a moderating effect.

The cultures, traditions, and spirituality of refugees and host societies are influential in their interactions. Both communities may experience economic, political, and social changes due to this interaction. As the common denominator of these changes, the sense of closeness to God has a positive impact on inter-communal interaction and multiculturalism, resulting in a rise in positive attitudes toward refugees and a decrease in their social exclusion. For this purpose, policymakers need to make and implement policies, which will increase multiculturalism and reduce the exclusion of refugees, in schools, communities, and families. In countries like Turkey exposed to intense migration, the inclusion of courses on refugees and immigrants in schools will contribute to their adaptation process.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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