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A Structural Equation Modeling of Social Exclusion: A Study from Turkey

Neslihan Sam¹, Nuran Bayram²

¹Uludag University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of Political Science and Public Administration 16059 Gorukle/Bursa, Turkey

²Uludag University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of Econometrics, 16059 Gorukle/Bursa, Turkey

Abstract: The study aims to test whether poverty and life satisfaction have an effect on social exclusion by means of structural equation modeling. 436 volunteers participated in the study. The fit indices for the model were obtained as X2/df=5.914; GFI=0.98; CFI=0.95 and RMSEA= 0.04. These results show that the model has an acceptable fit. All the estimated measure coefficients were found statistically meaningful. It was concluded that poverty has a positive and strong effect on social exclusion, while life satisfaction has a negative and strong effect on social exclusion.

Keywords: Poverty, Social Exclusion, Life Satisfaction, Structural Equation Modeling, Turkey

1. Introduction

Social exclusion is a multidimensional phenomenon that occurs in both economic-structural and socio-cultural ways [1], [2], [3]. Lots of authors deal with the notion of social exclusion in four dimensions, namely poverty or exclusion from enough income and resources, exclusion from labor, exclusion from services and exclusion from social relationships [4].

When the notion of poverty is examined, it is possible to encounter three different definitions: absolute poverty, relative poverty and subjective poverty. Absolute poverty refers to the minimum income and expenditure level [5]. In the relative poverty measurements, the fulfilment of an individual's social, culturiltural, educational, health, and transportation needs to live a life above minimum standards is taken as the basis. The notion of subjective povertyincludes a different approach. According to this notion, the preferences of individuals are regarded within the scope of utility approach. In other words, subjective poverty expresses the feelings of people believing that they do not have enough income to provide an appropriate satisfaction level for themselves [6], [7], [8], [9], [10], [11], [12]. Life satisfaction, which is defined as a person's general judgment and evaluation of his/her own life [13], [14], deals generally with the cognitive evaluation of the life within such main living areas as family, social life and living environment [15]. When the literature is examined, it is possible to encounter a small number of studies examining the relationship between poverty and unemployment, which are in close relationship with the notions of life satisfaction and social exclusion. According to the studies carried out by Heady, Krause and Wagner (2009), poverty is effective in explaining life satisfaction [16]. In another study carried out by Rojas (2008), it is reported that the individual has an experienced poverty if his/her life satisfaction is low [17]. In the studies carried out by Clark et al. (2001) and Clark (2003), on the other hand, it is put forth that unemployment has a negative effect on life satisfaction [18], [19].

In the study of Shields et al. (2009), which is one of the few studies investigating the relationship between life satisfaction and social exclusion, a negative relationship was found between life satisfaction and social exclusion [20]. The same study also showed that social exclusion has even a little effect on explaining the variation in life satisfaction. In another study of Szukielojc-Bienkunska (2005), low life satisfaction among the social exclusion indicators was dealt with [21]. In the study carried out in Germany to determine the social exclusion level of the immigrants, it was found out that there is a strong relationship between employment and life satisfaction [22]. This study aims to test whether poverty and life satisfaction have an effect on social exclusion by means of structural equation modeling.

2. Method

2.1 Instruments

In the questionnaire form of the study, social exclusion scale and life satisfaction scale were used in addition to various socio-demographical variables.

Social Exclusion Scale: In order to measure social exclusion, this study adopts the social exclusion model developed by Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vrooman (2007), revised by Bayram et al. (2010, 2011) [23], [24] and added to the Turkish literature after its validity and reliability tests were made. This fivepoint scale includes thirty-five items. This scale consists of four dimensions, namely financial deprivation, access to social rights, social participation and cultural integration. This scale deals with access to social rights in two different sub-dimensions. The first sub-dimension includes benefiting from institutions and funds within the context of social rights, while the second sub-dimension includes benefiting from a suitable house and secure surrounding. Each item of the scale ranges from "never" to "always". High values obtained for each dimension in the social exclusion scale show that social exclusion level is high.

Poverty: It was taken as a latent variable having five indicators, namely economic condition, the number of individuals in a family, education level, employment status and social security [25]. The variables were defined as follows: Economic conditions variable: 1-good, 2-moderate 3-bad; Education level variable: 1-university and higher education, 2-high school, 3-primary school and 4- illiterate; Employment status variable: 1-working, 2-not working; Social security variable: 1- with social security, 2- without social security. As a result, the high levels in the poverty variable consisting of the aforementioned five variables show the highness of the poverty level.

Life Satisfaction Scale: In order to measure life satisfaction, this study adopts the five-item and seven-point life satisfaction scale (SWLS) [26], [27]. Each item of the scale ranges from "completely disagree" to "completely agree". High values obtained from the scale show a high-level life satisfaction level.

2.2. Participants

436 people participated voluntarily in the study. 47% of the participants were female. For the working out of the structural equation model used in the analysis of the data, AMOS 16.0 program was used.

2.3. Analysis

As the structural equation model allows direct and indirect simultaneous estimations, it is a suitable analysis technique to test especially the existence of mediator variables. According to the mostly used fit indices to evaluate the fit of the adopted model: (1) average square root of approximate errors (RMSEA) must be lower than 0.05 for a good fit; (2) good fit index (GFI) showing the quantity of variance and covariance of the model must be above 0.90 for an acceptable fit; (3) comparative fit index (CFI) must be above 0.95 for an acceptable fit [28].

3. Results

The ages of the participants of the study range between 18 and 69, and 53% of the participants are male. Approximately 55% of the participants have moderate economic conditions.

Figure 1 shows the structural equation model estimated for social exclusion. In this model, covariance between error terms were allowed, but they were not shown on a figure. The arrows drawn in the model show the hypotheses. In the model, $X^2/df=5.914$; GFI=0.98; CFI=0.95 and RMSEA= 0.04 fit indices were found, which show a good fit result. This implies that the tested model is a suitable model.



Figure 1: Structural Modeling for Social Exclusion

When the factor loads of the latent variables are examined, it is seen that they differ between 0.20 and 0.80 for the social exclusion latent variable, between 0.50 and 0.79 for life satisfaction, and between 0.25 and 0.61 for poverty. All of the obtained factor loads were found statistically meaningful. In the model, maximum likelihood estimation method was used for parameter estimations. The model's path coefficients are interpreted as standardized regression coefficients. All of the estimated coefficients were found statistically meaningful. R^2 value for social exclusion was obtained as 0.29. Poverty has a positive and strong effect on social exclusion (β =0.19; CR=5.08). This may lead one to conclude that the people feeling themselves poorer may also feel more social exclusion. Life satisfaction has a negative and strong effect on social exclusion (β =-0.47; CR=-8.05). This implies that the people who have lower life satisfaction feel more social exclusion. In addition, poverty has negative and direct effect on life satisfaction (β =-0.19; CR=-6.02), which implies that the people feeling themselves poor have lower life satisfaction.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigated the effect of poverty and life satisfaction on social exclusion by means of structural equation modeling. It was concluded that poverty has a positive and strong effect on social exclusion, while life satisfaction has a negative and strong effect on it.

In the studies carried out by Shields et al. (2009) and Szukielojc-Bienkunska (2005), negative correlations were found out between life satisfaction and social exclusion dimensions [20], [21]. In this context, the ones with high life satisfaction levels can be said to have low social exclusion levels. As a result of the correlation analysis, it was seen that the life satisfaction of females is higher when compared to that of males. When OECD report is examined, it is seen that the women have higher life satisfaction than men in Turkey, Korea and Japan (OECD countries) and the difference between male and female is the highest in Turkey. However, it is outstanding that male and female life satisfaction is below the average of the OECD countries. On the other hand, females and males have higher life satisfaction level in countries such as Australia, Belgium and Finland, which are among the countries above the average of OECD countries [29].

In the studies carried out to investigate the relationship between poverty and social exclusion, different results were obtained. In a comparative study made on Australia, it was concluded that England has higher income poverty while Australia has much higher rates in terms of both deprivation and exclusion [30]. In the study carried out by Eurostat (2003) on poverty, deprivation and social exclusion of the EU countries, it was found out that multi-dimensional deprivation risk as well as social exclusion increase during the poverty process [31]. Adaman and Ardıç found the rate of the ones feeling themselves socially excluded because of poverty to be 46% in Turkey [32].

Through structural equation modeling, it was found out in the present study that poverty and life satisfaction have important direct effects on perceived social exclusion. In addition, it was seen that poverty affects social exclusion indirectly over life satisfaction. 29% of the variance in social exclusion was found to be resulted from poverty and life satisfaction. Among the dimensions of social exclusion, the highest coefficient was obtained for financial deprivation, while the lowest one was obtained for cultural integration. In this context, it is possible to claim that financial deprivation is the most important component of social exclusion.

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Author Profile



Associate Prof. Dr. Neslihan Sam is working at Uludag University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of Political Science and Public Administration since 1994. Her

research work field is urbanization and environmental problems. She has several national and international papers on poverty, social exclusion, urban economics, urban sociology, and environmental psychology.



Prof. **Dr. Nuran Bayram** is working at Uludag University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of Econometrics since 1995. Her research work field is Linear and non-linear

multivariate statistical analysis, categorical data analysis, data mining, decision trees, Bayesian analysis and structural equation modeling. She has several national and international papers on quality of life, life satisfaction, integration, poverty, social exclusion, violence, violence against women, emotional abuse, crime and mood.

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