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Identified predictors and levels of burnout among staff workers in a refugee camp of first immigrant group: A cross-sectional study

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Abstract

Essential workers in a refugee camp are exposed to many stressors that influence their ability to perform their duties. This study aims to investigate the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction, depression, anxiety, and socio-demographic variables among staff workers in a refugee camp in Turkey. The Maslach Burnout Inventory, which assesses emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment, Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire, Beck Depression Inventory, Beck Anxiety Inventory, and socio-demographic variable form was administered to 199 staff workers in refugee camps in Turkey. High-risk levels were found to be 40.2% in emotional exhaustion, which is considered the center of burnout. Female gender, working in the camp (>12 months), low extrinsic satisfaction, and high anxiety and depression levels predicted the emotional exhaustion. While low intrinsic satisfaction, high depression levels, and working in the camp (>12 months) were found to be predictors for depersonalization, low intrinsic satisfaction was determined to be a predictor for reduced personal accomplishment. It was determined that burnout was high among the personnel working in the refugee camps and the factors that played a role in its development were female gender, working in the camp (>12 months), low extrinsic satisfaction, high anxiety and depression levels, and low intrinsic satisfaction. It is recommended that these personnel be evaluated first, improving their working conditions, and providing psychosocial support.

Keywords: Burnout, job satisfaction, refugee camp, working staff, depression, anxiety, essential worker, social work

Introduction

The number of refugees leaving their countries due to oppression, conflict, violence, and human rights violations has been increasing and has become a growing problem worldwide [1]. Turkey houses a total of 3.657.694 registered Syrians although the unofficial numbers far exceed this number. In 5 provinces, there are a total of 7 refugee camps that shelter 63.584 Syrian refugees [2]. Numerous government workers are employed in these camps servicing in areas such as, accommodation, security, health, education, and nutrition [3].

Workers employ several jobs in refugee camps such as cleaning, administration, justice governance, security, teaching, counseling, and many more physically and psychologically demanding jobs to meet the needs of the refugee populations. The work is typically done under time pressure with inadequate preparation and lack of resources [4]. While this is the norm for the refugee camp workers worldwide in similar conditions, working under pressure with inadequate preparation is now highlighted because of the extraordinary situation the pandemic has created. Most of the time, the conditions in which these workers perform their tasks are not taken into consideration, and stress is expected to be the part of the job. Working closely with refugees includes sharing of the trauma, pain, hardship, desperation, and violence. The physical and mental exhaustion created by sharing these difficult situations become evident in Perry's (2003) work [5]. Workers in camps perform their tasks daily in stressful environments. The stressors may include breakdown of communication, emotional burdening, and physical

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exertion and safety issues. The breakdown of communication may be from language or cultural issues; emotional burdening could be because of the difficult and traumatic circumstances and stories refugees share with the workers; physical exertion could include long hours of workdays and keeping the grounds, and safety issues include violence or disease outbreaks [6].

Burnout is characterized by the symptoms of emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and reduced personal accomplishment (RPA). It is thought to be caused by a complex interaction between society, the working environment, and individual susceptibilities. The central element is chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors at work and a subsequent depletion of resources over time [7]. The expectations of the job along with the expectations from self-endanger a person's capacity to remain healthy emotionally and physically especially in stressful situations. The psychological trauma experienced by the refugees reflects to the people who work with them adding to the already stressful job environment. The three dimensions of "burnout" are resulted from contact with other people: a sort of transference of emotional burden experienced by the people employed in the social work arena. It has been determined in previous studies that many professionals working with traumatized persons may experience emotional distress. Such types of emotional distress include high anxiety levels, high depressive symptoms, burnout, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) [8,9]. Previous research about refugee camps does not specifically tackle the issue of burnout on general staff. Therefore, identifying the prevalence of burnout and its predictive factors can help to develop appropriate preventive interventions.

With the growing pandemic, we have witnessed first-hand the aid and social workers' sacrifices and had a glimpse of their struggles as essential workers. The impact of living under such professional and emotional pressure strains the workers' well-being in many ways. This study is more relevant and sheds light on a forgotten reality of the burnout effect, and how it influences the work as well as the struggles of the individuals performing the tasks. The aim of this study was to examine the level of burnout among staff workers and its predictive factors in a refugee camp in Turkey. To determine the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction, depression, anxiety, and sociodemographic features. This study postulates that the high-risk levels of burnout may be related to the level of job satisfaction, depression, anxiety, and sociodemographic features.

Materials and Methods

Participants and procedures

This study took place in September and October 2013 in a refugee camp hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey's Kilis province which is in an area close to the Syrian border. The study's Ethical Committee Approval was taken from Gaziantep Zirve University's Ethics Committee (2013/589). The 'container city' [refugee camp] was established on 315 acres of land and opened in March 2012. At the time of the study, in this camp, there was a field hospital, a school, several places of worship, a market, social facilities, and 12,300 refugees lived in 2065 containers. The aim of the study was to reach all 223 people of the container city employees. Due to annual leaves, shift work system, and for not wanting to participate in the study, 24 people could not be included in the study and 199

participants were interviewed. The workers in the Syrian refugee camps in Turkey are mostly government workers that are assigned to those positions. They have no training or previous experience handling people who have gone through trauma. They may have been teachers working at a public school, or janitors from a government building reassigned, or administrators or clerks working for a certain ministry that have been reappointed to cover the needs in a refugee camp controlled by the government. The jobs of the participants included in the study were security officer, teacher, assistant teacher (Masters Student), interpreter, medical officer, nurse, doctor, psychologist, search and rescue technician, archive officer, construction technician, field officer, service personnel (cleaning), driver, purchasing officer, governor's private secretary and chief of local authority. The purpose of the study was explained to participants by authors MC and BG, and the participants were included in the study on a voluntary basis. Socio-Demographic Information Form, Maslach Burnout Inventory (MTI), Minnesota Job Satisfaction Scale (MSI), Beck Depression Scale (BDI), Beck Anxiety Scale (BAI) were administered to the participants by MC and BG.

Outcome measures

Socio-Demographic Information Form. The participants' information about age, gender, marital status, type of school graduated, number of working months, daily working hours, volunteering, wages, and economic status were obtained in the form prepared by the authors for the purpose of the research.

Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). This scale was developed by Maslach and Jackson [10]. MBI measures burnout as a 3-dimensional syndrome of (1) EE (feeling emotionally drained by one's contact with other people), (2) DP (negative feelings and cynical attitudes toward the recipients of one's service or care), and (3) RPA (a tendency to negatively evaluate one's own work) that occurs among individuals who work with people in some capacity. The high score obtained from the EE and DP sub-dimensions, and the low score obtained from the PA sub-dimension indicated high burnout. The Turkish adaptation of the scale was performed on health professionals by Ergin (1995), and the original 7-point Likert scale was changed to 5-point Likert scale. In the scale, (0) Never (1) Very rare (2) Sometimes (3) Most of the time (4) [11]. Always was used as a 5-point rating. In this study, burnout scores were expressed as low, moderate, and high burnout levels according to the related literature. (EE: low: 0-11, medium 12-17, high: high 18; DP: low: 0-5, medium: 6-9, high: ≥ 10 and PA: low: ≥ 26 , medium: 22-25, high: 0-21). The Coefficient alpha of the MBI were calculated in the present study and found to be as follows: EE=0.81; DP=0.80; PA=0.73

Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ). The MSQ was developed by Weiss, Dawis, & England, (1967) [12]. It evaluates job satisfaction on a total of 20 dimensions. The first reliability and validity study for Turkish was conducted by Baycan in 1985 [13]. The scale is a five-point Likert scale, "Not at all satisfactory (1)" to "Very satisfactory (5)" Another Turkish adaptation of the scale was made by Tezer (2016) and was evaluated by 3 factors; Intrinsic Satisfaction (IS), Extrinsic Satisfaction (ES) and General Satisfaction (GS) [14]. Cronbach alpha value was found to be 0.81 in that study. The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 20 and the highest score is 100. In this study, 25 and below means

low job satisfaction, 26-74 means average job satisfaction, and 75 and higher means high job satisfaction as general satisfaction score values. Coefficient alpha for GS was 0.89, for the IS dimension was 0.83 and for the ES dimension it was 0.80 in the present study.

Beck Depression Inventory (BDI). BDI is a clinical scale developed by Beck et al. (1961) to evaluate depression symptoms [15]. The scores range from 0-63. Higher total scores indicate severe depression. The Turkish version of the scale was adapted by Hisli (1989) [16]. Cut-off points in Turkish adult population, between 13-18 “mild depression”, between 19-28 “moderate depression”; between 29-63 was evaluated as “severe depression” [17]. Cronbach a coefficient for the nonclinical and clinical groups were found to be 0.90 and 0.89, respectively in that study.

Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI). BAI is a self-report scale that aims to measure the frequency of anxiety symptoms [18]. The scores range from 0-63. Higher total scores indicate severe anxiety. In this study, 8-15 “mild anxiety”, 16-25 “moderate anxiety”; between 26-63 was evaluated as “severe anxiety”. The Turkish validity and reliability study of the scale was conducted by Ulusoy, Şahin and Erkman [19]. Cronbach alpha value was found to be 0.81 in that study.

Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using the SPSS® statistical software (version 20.0 for Mac OS; SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Descriptive statistics were presented in frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and min–max. Chi-square test was used to test possible differences between groups in terms of categorical variables. Normality tests were carried out by using one-sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests and through histogram graphs. The Mann–Whitney U, Student t and one-way ANOVA tests were utilized for comparing the continuous variables. The relationship between the numerical variables was tested using a Pearson correlation or Spearman’s rank correlation. Multiple linear regressions were calculated to predict EE, DP, and PA, based on sex, age, economic well-being, working time in camp, and scores of IS, ES, BDI and BAI. The variables assessed were determined by clinical experience and a review of the literature. The tests for assumptions-linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity were carried out by the authors (assumptions met). The internal consistency of the scales and subscales were analyzed by using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. All the analyses statistical significance were at a 2-sided alpha level of 0.05.

Results

Of the 199 participants, 97 (48.7%) were female, 102 (47.7%) were male, and 91 (45.7%) were married. The mean age was 29.46±7.91 (min:18,max:55). The work duration was 12.90±7.91 (min:1,max:24) months. Satisfaction with economic well-being was 77 (38.7%) and voluntary work was 182 (91.5%). The sociodemographic characteristics of the 199 participants included in the study are summarized in Table 1.

High risk levels were determined in 40.2% EE, 19.6% DP, as opposed to only 11.1% experiencing PA. Overall job satisfaction was moderate in 94.0% of participants. Beck Depression score was 6.0% moderate, 3.0% severe, Beck anxiety score was 8.0%

moderate, 7.5% severe. The analysis results of the scales are summarized in Table 2.

Table 1. Sociodemographic variables of the sample (n=199)

	n (%)	mean±SD (min-max)
Sex		
Female	97(48.7)	
Male	102(51.3)	
Marital status		
Married	91(45.7)	
Single	108(54.3)	
Age		29.46±7.91 (18-55)
Working time in camp (month)		12.90±7.91 (1-24)
Occupation		
Security guard	100(50.3)	
Teacher	26(13.1)	
Teacher assistant	34(17.1)	
Translator	14(7.0)	
Other	25(12.5)	
Education^[13]		
Primary school (0-8 years)	48(24.1)	
High school (8-12 years)	99(49.7)	
University (>12 years)	52(26.2)	
Working hour (hours/day)		
<8	20(10.1)	
8	153(76.9)	
>8	26(13.1)	
Economic Well-Being		
Fair/Bad	122(61.3)	
Good	77(38.7)	
Volunteering		
No	17(8.5)	
Yes	182(91.5)	
Previous psychiatric disorder	5(2.5)	
Additional medical disorders	6(3.0)	

Table 2. MSQ, MBI, BDI and BAI values (n=199)

	mean±SD (min-max)	n (%)
MBI		
Emotional exhaustion	18.11±7.79 (9-45)	
Low		35(17.6)
Moderate		84(42.2)
High		80(40.2)
Depersonalization	7.57±3.64 (4-25)	
Low		99(49.7)
Moderate		61(30.7)
High		39(19.6)
Personal accomplishments	31.10±7.16 (8-40)	
Low		157(78.9)
Moderate		20(10.1)
High		22(11.1)
MSQ		
General satisfaction	56.64±11.83 (5-80)	
Low		3(1.5)
Moderate		187(94.0)
High		9(4.5)
Intrinsic satisfaction	35.43±7.01 (2-48)	
Extrinsic satisfaction	21.21±5.68 (2-32)	
BDI		
Mild		31(15.6)
Moderate		12(6.0)
Severe		6(3.0)
BAI	7.68±10.89 (0-63)	
Mild		33(16.6)
Moderate		16(8.0)
Severe		15(7.5)

MSQ: Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire

MBI: Maslach Burnout Inventory

BDI: Beck Depression Inventory

BAI: Beck Anxiety Inventory

There was a statistically significant relationship between EE and gender (being a woman), marital status (being single), education (primary level), age (being between 18-24), working time in the camp (working for more than 12 months), volunteering (being assigned to work as opposed to choosing the position), and economic status (being in lower socio-economic status). (p values, respectively; <.001, .015, .030, .003, .016, .011, <.001). A statistically significant relationship was found between DP and duration of work in the camp (working for more than 12 months), volunteering (being assigned to work as opposed to choosing the position) and economic situation (being in lower socio-economic status) (p values of .008, .019, .006 respectively). There was a statistically significant relationship between PA and volunteering (p=.018). The relationship between sociodemographic characteristics and subscales of MBI are summarized in Table 3.

EE was inversely correlated with IS (r=.475), ES (r=.559) and GS (r=.550), and positively correlated with BDI score (r=.668), and BAI score (r=.649). DP was inversely correlated with IS (r=.430), ES (r=.453) and GS (r=.472), and positively correlated with BDI score (r=.472), and BAI score (r=.400). PA was inversely correlated with BDI score (r=.308) and BAI score (r=.322), and positively correlated with IS (r=.398), ES (r=.305) and GS (r=.382). The results of correlation analysis between scales are summarized in Table 4.

Multiple linear regressions were calculated to predict EE, DP, and PA. The results are summarized in Table 5. A significant regression equation was found (F (8, 190)=34.394,p=.000), with an R2 of .592 for EE. The individual predictors were examined further. As a result of evaluation, it was detected that EE significantly predicted by the female gender, working in the camp for more than 12 months, low extrinsic satisfaction, and high anxiety and depression levels.

A significant regression equation was found (F (8, 190)=12.714, p=.000), with an R2 of .349 for DP. It was revealed that having been working for more than 12 months, low intrinsic Satisfaction, high depression level significantly predicted DP. A significant regression equation was found (F (8, 190)=7.024,p=.000), with an R2 of .228 for PA. The individual predictors' examination revealed that reduced PA significantly predicted by low intrinsic satisfaction.

Discussion

This study was investigated the levels of burnout among staff workers and their predictive factors in a refugee camp in Turkey. Main findings in the present study indicate that high-risk level was determined from 40.2% EE, 19.6% DP and 11.1% Low PA scores. Overall job satisfaction was moderate in 94.0% of the participants. Positive correlations were found between EE risk level and sociodemographic features such as female gender, being 18-24 years old, being single, high education level, working for more than 12 months, assigned to work in the camp (as opposed to volunteering), and having low socio-economic status (being in poor condition). There was a statistically significant relationship between DP risk level and being employed for more than 12 months, assigned to work in the camp (not volunteering), and having low socio-economic status.

Table 3. Sociodemographic features of sample and their relation to subscales of MBI

	n=199 n (%)	EE mean±SD	p	DP mean±SD	p	PA mean±SD	p
Sex			<0.001***		0.967		0.250
Female	97(48.7)	20.44±7.72		7.56±3.37		30.50±6.77	
Male	102(51.3)	15.90±7.21		7.58±3.90		31.67±7.49	
Marital status			0.015*		0.768		0.931
Married	91(45.7)	16.56±7.35		7.49±3.50		31.15±7.15	
Single	108(54.3)	19.34±7.96		7.64±3.67		31.06±7.20	
Education status			0.030*		0.365		0.808
Primary school	48(24.1)	15.70±6.56		7.08±3.09		30.68±7.54	
High school	99(49.7)	18.43±7.97		7.53±3.38		31.43±7.17	
University	52(26.2)	19.73±8.08		8.11±4.50		30.86±6.87	
Age			0.003**		0.868		0.373
18-24	63(31.7)	20.87±7.97		7.60±3.42		30.19±7.41	
25-30	60(30.2)	16.75±8.22		7.71±4.12		30.66±7.86	
31-35	35(17.6)	15.60±4.82		7.11±2.88		31.97±6.56	
>35	41(20.6)	18.02±7.87		7.73±3.88		32.41±6.05	
Working time in camp (month)			0.016*		0.008**		0.131
≤12	130(65.3)	17.15±7.32		7.00±2.87		30.54±7.43	
>12	69(34.7)	19.92±8.36		8.65±4.61		32.15±6.54	
Volunteering			0.011*		0.019*		0.018*
No	17(8.5)	23.00±9.61		9.52±4.96		28.00±6.14	
Yes	182(91.5)	17.65±7.46		7.39±3.45		31.39±7.19	
Economic Well-Being			<0.001***		0.006**		0.474
Fair/Bad	122(61.3)	19.72±8.35		8.04±3.84		31.04±6.63	
Good	77(38.7)	15.57±6.03		6.84±3.18		31.20±7.97	

MBI: Maslach Burnout Inventory; EE: Emotional exhaustion; DP: Depersonalization; PA: Personal accomplishments.

*: P<.05; **: P<.01; ***: P<.001

Table 4. Result of correlation analysis between subscales of MBI and MSQ, BDI and BAI

	EE	DP	PA
Intrinsic satisfaction	-.475*	-.430*	.398*
Extrinsic satisfaction	-.559*	-.453*	.305*
General satisfaction	-.550*	-.472*	.382*
BDI	.668*	.472*	-.308*
BAI	.649*	.400*	-.322*

MSQ: Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire; MBI: Maslach Burnout Inventory; BDI: Beck Depression Inventory; BAI: Beck Anxiety Inventory; EE: Emotional exhaustion; DP: Depersonalization; PA: Personal accomplishments.

*: P<.01.

Table 5. Emotional exhaustion, Depersonalization and Personal accomplishments level regressed on four predictors

	Emotional exhaustion			Depersonalization			Personal accomplishments		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
Sex¹	1.909	0.769	0.123*	-0.759	0.455	-0.104	-0.363	0.972	-0.025
Age²	-0.068	0.048	-0.069	0.006	0.028	0.014	0.074	0.060	0.081
Economic Well-Being³	-0.712	0.795	-0.045	0.100	0.470	0.013	-1.116	1.005	-0.076
Working time in camp⁴	0.128	0.050	0.130*	0.080	0.030	0.173**	0.101	0.063	0.111
Intrinsic satisfaction	-0.139	0.080	-0.125	-0.099	0.047	-0.191*	0.321	0.101	0.315**
Extrinsic satisfaction	-0.270	0.102	-0.197**	-0.101	0.060	-0.158	0.010	0.129	0.008
BDI	0.268	0.074	0.303***	0.135	0.044	0.325**	-0.031	0.093	-0.038
BAI	0.147	0.060	0.206*	0.003	0.035	0.009	-0.126	0.075	-0.191
R²	0.592			0.349			0.228		
F(8, 190)	34.39***			12.71***			7.02***		

BDI: Beck Depression Inventory; BAI: Beck Anxiety Inventory.

B=Unstandardized beta coefficient; SE = Standard error; β = Standardized beta coefficient

¹: (male=0, female=1); ²: (years); ³: (Fair/Bad=0, Good=1); ⁴: (0= \leq 12-month, 1= $>$ 12 month)

*: P<.05; **: P<.01; ***: P<.001.

It has been determined in previous studies that many professionals working with traumatized persons may experience emotional distress. Such types of emotional distress include high anxiety levels, high depressive symptoms, burnout, and PTSD [8,9]. For example, in a study conducted by UNHCR, 31% EE, 9% DP, 43% Low PA risk rates were reported in humanitarian workers [20]. The Global Personnel Survey in 2014 found that 73% of the participants were satisfied with their current work. In fact, humanitarian work in general has been found to be the greatest risk factor for the development of professional burnout [21]. When the findings of the literature and the findings of our study are evaluated together, the people who are exposed to trauma and employees who work with them report a moderate to higher job satisfaction, but are at risk for anxiety, depression, and burnout.

Like our results, it has been shown in many studies that the risk of anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and burnout is higher in traumatized and working women than in men [22,23]. The assumption that women have a higher risk of mental health problems in different geographies and cultures leads to the study of factors other than cultural and geographical characteristics to explain this situation [24]. Multi-center longitudinal studies are needed to better understand the gender effect.

According to Cieslak et al., (2014) the stress experienced by workers that are indirectly exposed to trauma through the people who are directly exposed, experience a secondary trauma and job burnout causing increased incidences of depression and anxiety among the workers [26]. In our study, the workers who have a chance to know the detailed accounts of the refugees lives and traumas are more vulnerable to experience secondary hand trauma more than the workers who have limited access and understanding of the refugees directly exposed to trauma. These workers include

but are not limited to the teachers and social workers in the refugee camp. When consider the current results, it is alarming to see these essential workers in a pandemic exposed to similar conditions worldwide experiencing these effects as well. Further investigation with added stressors of a pandemic such as fear for personal health safety, even increased work hours without breaks, and being isolated from family for safety precautions can be taken into consideration.

This study has also identified the differences in coping mechanisms between males and females, as well as some distinguishing factors that influence the alarming rate of depression and anxiety that interfere with the overall job satisfaction of employees in different categories. In the findings, we have stated that women workers have been disproportionately scored higher in the emotional burnout survey than their male counterparts having the same conditions. The 18–24-year-old, educated, poor, female workers may have fewer coping mechanisms in terms of family support like a spouse or other factors that make her feel connected, or outside therapy which costs money. This group seems to be the most vulnerable also because the expectations from these workers might be higher than their higher economic status counterparts. We have based our findings on the full-time workers assuming 40 hour/week of working schedule; only about 10% of employees working less than 8 hours and about 13% of them working more than 8 hours per day. Majority of the highly educated female personnel work as teachers. Majority of the security personnel are reported as male. The interactions of teachers to the refugee children have been around 6-8 hours per day and five times per week which increased the chances of being exposed to and connecting with the traumatized refugees. One begins to wonder these effects as the pandemic brings a whole new set of educational challenges onto the table. The essential workers such as social workers'

and teachers' potential burnout effects are higher and even more relevant nowadays.

Limitations

The cross-sectional design was the first limitation for this study. A longitudinal study measuring the effects of burnout over time might have pinpointed the amount of time it takes for burnout to take effect providing a critical point of which prevention and control measures that need to be taken into consideration.

Conclusion

In this study, we demonstrated the high-risk factors of burnout as they are explained as job satisfaction, depression, anxiety, and sociodemographic features. In addition, gender also was a predictive factor as women workers have been disproportionately scored higher in the Emotional exhaustion survey than their male counterparts having the same conditions meaning emotionally their responsibilities both in and out of their jobs took a higher toll on their mental well-being. We have also identified differences in coping mechanisms between males and females as related to their job position as well as socioeconomic status. The higher the educational level and SES, the better the coping mechanism worked. The alarming rate of depression and anxiety that contributed to the burnout of employees in various categories and backgrounds. As we experienced in this Covid 19 crisis, the essential staff of refugee camps are also overworked and not adequately prepared for the demands their jobs brought forward. It is worrisome to imagine the situation being doubled down for the workers adding the burden of a pandemic. Adequate measures should be provided for best practices to alleviate the predictor factors for refugee camp workers who are affected by the trauma and stress of their surroundings as well as for their mental and physical well-being.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Ethical approval

The study's Ethical Committee Approval was taken from Gaziantep Zirve University's Ethics Committee (2013/589).

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