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Summary

***Ageing in a migration context:
Resilience in Turkish and Moroccan immigrants***

Migration and ageing are two global phenomena that have substantially impacted the demographic composition of countries. Both ageing and migration are associated with disadvantages that can lead to a poor health and a low well-being. In the Netherlands, this is true for Turkish and Moroccan older adults who moved to the Netherlands for reasons of labour or family reunification in the 1960s and 1970s. Many Turkish and Moroccan immigrants and their spouses face an accumulation of disadvantages as a consequence of their international migration as well as their position in the country of settlement. Such disadvantages include the exposure to a low socioeconomic position, language barriers, discrimination and segregation, and loneliness. In addition, immigrants are, on average, confronted with higher levels of disability and physical health problems than their native Dutch age-peers.

Yet, not all immigrants are in a bad condition. There is substantial heterogeneity in functioning. Some immigrants have shown exceptional resilience and some have aged in relatively good health. An intriguing question is how some immigrants have managed to stay free of disease, disability and maintained a high well-being while others did not.

The present dissertation studies resilience among former Turkish and Moroccan labour immigrants and their spouses living in the Netherlands. Resilience research investigates the people who thrive in the face of adversity. As such, resilience approaches are aimed at explaining the prevalence or occurrence of good outcomes despite adversity. Resilience research might offer an alternative to the focus on poor aspects of functioning in older Turkish and Moroccan immigrants. In doing so, this research contributes to a more complete picture of the variability of functioning in these groups.

Research questions

The research is guided by the following questions:

To what extent are Turkish and Moroccan immigrants residing in the Netherlands resilient in the context of migration-related and ageing-related adversities?

Which resources did resilient Turkish and Moroccan immigrants use in order to reach favourable outcomes?

Approaches to resilience

I use two approaches for resilience. First is the ‘a priori’ approach to resilience, which starts with the realisation that exposure to adversity does not necessarily imply a negative outcome. I identify an adversity and a good outcome. Persons who are exposed to high levels of the adversity but nonetheless display good outcomes are defined as resilient. The next step is

to identify resources or protective factors that explain why some individuals are categorized as resilient.

The second approach to resilience is the 'resilience across the life course' approach. This approach acknowledges that resilience might vary across the life course of individuals. Therefore, capturing resilience at only one point in time might not fully capture the resilience of the person across the life course. I investigate the usefulness of resources across the life course, identifying resources in the life stories of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants.

Methods & data

Two of the four chapters use data derived from the Longitudinal Aging Study Amsterdam (LASA). LASA is an ongoing longitudinal, multidisciplinary study that focuses on investigating the determinants and consequences of changes in social, cognitive, physical, and emotional domains of functioning in older adults. The first sample consists of 269 adults born in Turkey and 209 adults born in Morocco with interview data collected in 2013-2014 both aged 55-64 years. Interviews are conducted in Dutch, Turkish, Moroccan Arabic (Darija) or Berber language (Tarafit). The second sample consists of 1,023 native Dutch older adults who are also aged between 55-64 years. These data were collected in 2012-2013.

In two of the four chapters, qualitative data are used. The qualitative data are based on 23 life course interviews with Turkish and Moroccan immigrants between the ages of 60 and 69 years. I collaborated with bilingual research-assistants who were extensively briefed on the research method, the research approach and the topic of study. The assistants had the role of translator, and they translated and transcribed the interviews verbatim. All qualitative data were analysed with a thematic approach.

Study 1 (Chapter 2): How do Turkish and Moroccan immigrants position themselves in the social hierarchy?

In the Netherlands, immigrants are often ascribed a low position in the social hierarchy. This is because of an accumulation of adversities faced by immigrants, including a low educational level, occupational prestige and income. Yet, many immigrants migrated to improve their social position and many succeeded in improving their economic and social position. Therefore, it might be possible that immigrants do not consider themselves positioned as low as is ascribed to them. This chapter aims to gain a better understanding of how Turkish and Moroccan immigrants position themselves in the social hierarchy at different moments in their life (i.e. before and after migration and currently). In doing so the chapter contributes to an understanding of resilience across the life course by describing of how immigrants themselves understand their (vulnerable) position and whether they are capable of claiming a more favourable position.

The study shows that not all immigrants ascribe themselves a low social position. The majority of respondents even place themselves at a middle or higher position. Factors that contribute to placement were not only circumstances related to socioeconomic indicators, but also circumstances related to social affirmation, family life, social integration, physical, mental health, happiness and complying to religious prescriptions. The social position of immigrants changes over life stages, with some immigrants placing themselves high before migration and low afterwards, while others remain in the same position or improve their position over time. In conclusion, immigrants have a comprehensive and dynamic perspective on their social position. Migration plays a large role in perceived changes in terms of social integration, future prospects and expectations in life. When these are deemed more favourable, respondents tend to position themselves higher.

Study 2 (Chapter 3): Resilience in the context of the disablement model: Are immigrants more resilient?

While immigrants have often experienced additional adversities due to their migration experience compared to those without a migration experience, this does not mean that they are self-evidently less resilient than their native Dutch counterparts. According to the steeling effect hypothesis, people who experience more adversities during their life time might be better equipped to deal with adversities in general.

In order to test the idea that immigrants might be more resilient than their native age-peers, I study resilience with an 'a priori' approach, using one transition in the disablement process model as 'yardstick' for resilience. The disablement process model explains that an individual goes through several transitions of physical deterioration before the individual experiences disability. Each phase increased the likelihood of experiencing the next phase. Hence the situation in one stage can be seen as a risk factor for transitioning into the next phase. One of these phases includes a transition from physical impairment (e.g., slowness of gait speed) to disability. An individual can, thus, be labelled as resilient when the individual has a high risk, for example a low gait speed, and favourable outcome, for example little disability.

In addition to differences in resilience *between* immigrants and native age-peers, I test whether there are differences *within* immigrant groups. More specifically, three important factors with protective qualities in the relationship between impairment and disability are derived from the disablement process model: mastery, income and contact frequency within personal relationships. These factors are subsequently compared across origin groups.

The study indicates that Turkish, but not Moroccan, immigrants demonstrate stronger associations between gait speed and disability than the native Dutch older adults. I conclude that Moroccan immigrants and Dutch older adults appeared to be more resilient against

impairments according to the definition that I use, than Turkish immigrants. In addition, sense of mastery protects against disability in those with physical impairment in Turkish immigrants. Income acts as a protective factor in the Dutch, but not in the Turkish and Moroccan immigrants. Thus, resilience mechanisms are not universal across origin groups.

Study 3 (Chapter 4): Does religion provide protection to immigrants when they cope with having limited resources?

In Chapter 4, I study the role of religion in resilience in the context of lacking physical, social and socioeconomic resources and well-being from an 'a priori' approach. Religion stood out from the previous literature as being particularly helpful for immigrants who have relatively few resources. Almost all Turkish and Moroccan immigrants report to be religious, and many visit the local mosque weekly. Privately, religious activities such as seeking help from God in times of crisis, might offer a source of strength, meaning in life, and a sense of happiness. Particularly in a context where resources are lacking, compensation is offered through mental activities of reappraisal, a quest for meaning in life and a sense of security. Publicly, religious activities such as religious attendance and active involvement in religious organisations are important. They offer social support, ensure social integration into communities, provide a sense of belonging to a community and result in feelings of being valued and protected. Similarly to private religious activities, public religious activities may provide support in the context of lacking resources.

Data analyses yields three distinct patterns of absence of resources, namely physically disadvantaged, multiple disadvantaged, and relatively advantaged, the physically and multiple disadvantaged have a lower level of well-being compared to persons who are relatively advantaged. I find that private religious activities are positively related to well-being among Turkish and Moroccan immigrants. In situations where resources were lacking, however, the relation between private religious activities and well-being is negative. The study highlights the importance of context, disadvantage and type of religious activity for well-being.

Study 4 (Chapter 5): How do resources manifest themselves over different life stages before and right after migration and in older age?

In addition to religious resources, other resources might be important for resilience. Few resources have been identified so far, especially because research about resilience among older labour immigrants is scarce. I investigate what resources helped Turkish and Moroccan immigrants to deal with adversities that are associated with ageing and migration. I define four life-stages to investigate whether resources remained useful over the life course, namely, settling into the host society, maintaining settlement, restructuring life post-retirement, and increasing dependency. In this chapter I adopt the 'resilience across the life course' approach.

Resources that promote resilience regardless of life stage included having had an education in the country of origin, dealing with language barriers, having two incomes, making life meaningful, having strong social and community networks, having made financial investments, using humour to deal with adversity, and having the means to sustain a transnational lifestyle traveling back and forth to the country of origin. More resilient individuals invest in actively improving their life conditions and are good at accepting conditions that cannot be changed.

I find that resilience across the life course varies. Particularly, I find several distinct patterns in which participants were very resilient in the initial stages of migration but not so resilient in later stages and vice versa. Some resources that are useful for participants in early stages – i.e., ‘taking advantage of newfound freedom’ and ‘resigning to the situation’ – are not so useful in later stages of life. There are also resources that were particularly useful in later stages – i.e., ‘having made sustainable investments’ and ‘participating in family life’ – but increase stress in earlier stages, when participants feel they lost status after migration and missed their families.

Two societal conditions were important for the resilience of immigrants. First, the halting of the economic growth in the 1970s during the oil crisis, which lowered the number of available manual labour jobs. Immigrants who are resilient against this development often noticed the job insecurity before it caused them to lose their job and negotiated for other positions within their company. Participants who experienced social mobility in their lifetime, often through educational attainment, also are equipped to deal with this societal change. Second, during the restructuring life post-retirement and the increasing dependency stage, participants mention increasing perceptions of discrimination and no longer feeling welcome. This may reflect the increased moral panic towards immigrants with an Islamic background and a pressure to assimilate. Immigrants manage to foster resilience in this situation by using humorous responses to discriminatory remarks or by emphasizing their own successes as active contributors to society. Hence, dwelling on success in prior life stages, making sustainable investments, and confronting discrimination fosters resilience against this changing societal context.

Conclusion & discussion

I draw three conclusions about resilience among older immigrants. First, resilience and the usefulness of resources depend on the specific situation that is being studied. For example, religion is a resource that fulfilled an ambiguous role among older immigrants. Religious activities are harmful for wellbeing when other social, physical and socioeconomic resources are lacking. Yet, when asked, immigrants themselves fully endorse the protective qualities of religion. Future studies may investigate which resources are useful to immigrants

against which specific risk and for which specific outcome. Second, the availability and the usefulness of resources are determined by contextual conditions, which in turn influence resilience. I show that immigrants retire at a time when societal discourse about immigrants is changing. In recent times a lack of language skills could actually be a helpful shield against discriminatory remarks. Earlier, language skills were useful when immigrants were young and language skills were used to seize opportunities for social mobility. Thus, it is important to both consider the resource and its contextual conditions before drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of a resource. Third, I find that resources could be situated in individual and social domains. For instance, I find that the individual sense of control functions and having neighbours and family members function as resource. Future research may investigate which combination and quantity of individual and social resources foster the best resilience responses.

