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6.

General discussion

Summary of findings

In this thesis, I set out to answer the following research 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 obtain favourable outcomes?* To answer these questions two resilience approaches, namely the ‘a priori’ approach to resilience and the resilience across the life course approach, were applied, in four empirical chapters.

In the second chapter I departed from the ‘resilience across the life course’ approach. I evaluated immigrants’ own perspective of their position on the societal ladder. In this qualitative study, participants were confronted with a picture of a 10-rung ladder. They were asked where they would position themselves and why. I found that the majority of participants placed themselves at a middle or higher position. Placement on a certain rung was related to socioeconomic circumstances as well as circumstances related to social affirmation, family life, social integration, physical and mental health, happiness and complying to religious prescriptions. The social position of immigrants was dynamic over life stages with some immigrants placing themselves high before migration and low afterwards, while others remained in the same position or improved their position over time.

The third and fourth chapter investigated resilience from an ‘a priori’ approach using quantitative data. In the third chapter, I investigated resilience in the disabling effect of a walking impairment on activity limitations. The study indicated that Turkish, but not Moroccan, immigrants demonstrated stronger associations between gait speed and activity limitations than the native Dutch older adults. In addition, sense of mastery buffered against disability in those with physical impairment in Turkish immigrants. Income acted as a buffer in the Dutch, but not in the Turkish and Moroccan immigrants. The study concluded that Moroccan immigrants and Dutch older adults appeared to be more resilient against impairments according to the definition that I used, than Turkish immigrants. Resilience mechanisms were not universal across populations.

The fourth chapter focused on whether private and public religious activities reduced the negative effects of a lack of physical, social, and socioeconomic resources on well-being among Turkish and Moroccan immigrants. Among the three patterns of disadvantage, namely physically disadvantaged, multiple disadvantaged, and relatively advantaged, the physically and multiple disadvantaged had a lower level of well-being compared to persons who are relatively advantaged. I found that private religious activities were 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 was negative. The study highlighted the importance of context, disadvantage and type of religious activity for well-being.

The fifth paper investigated resilience in older immigrants by examining the resources they use to deal with adversities in the course of their lives. The circumstances under which individuals were resilient coincided with four life stages after migration, namely settling into the host society, maintaining settlement, restructuring life post-retirement, and increasing dependency. Resources that promote resilience 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 invested in actively improving their life conditions and are good at accepting conditions that cannot be changed.

General discussion

The findings are discussed in the light of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1999). The studies were not initially designed to be evaluated in this way, but in retrospect the theory offers a good framework for discussing the findings for two reasons. First, because Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory offers an overarching framework to understand how resources can operate on various micro-, meso- and macro-levels. Second, because the theory offers a way to understand how resources operating on different levels may interact with each other. Similar multidimensional systems approaches were applied to resilience research several times before (Ager et al., 2010; Boon, Cottrell, King, Stevenson, & Millar, 2012; Kumpfer & Summerhays, 2006; Landau, 2007) and most notably by Ungar (2011), whose definition of resilience was used as approach to resilience in Chapter 6.

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1999) risks, adversities and resources may be present on several overarching systems that are depicted in Figure 6.1. First is the microsystem. This is the system in which the individual participates and concerns all things directly linked to the individual. I define resources in this level including mastery, income (Chapter 3), and religious coping (Chapter 4). The mesosystem is the system where members from different microsystems interact with each other independent of the central individual. A resource used within this system is contact frequency with the social network (Chapter 3 and 4). The third system, the exosystem, encompasses entities and organisations that might be accessed by the individual or their families. Resources within this system include public religious activities such as participation in religious organisations or religious attendance (Chapter 4). Fourth, the macrosystem holds the policies, views and customs that represent the cultural fabric of a society. Resources situated in this system are social norms about family and relationships (Chapter 2 and 5), the availability of manual labour jobs and economic security (Chapter 2 and 5) or responses to the public opinion of immigrants

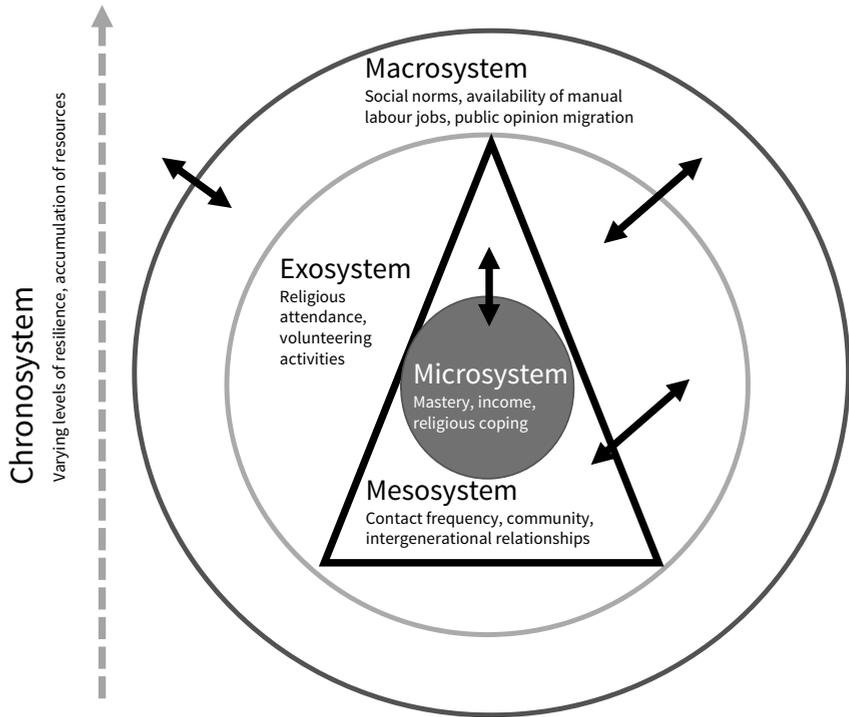


Figure 6.1. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

(Chapter 5). Lastly, the chronosystem relates to the time in which the events occur in the individual's environment. Chapter 5 highlights how different resources collected in the life stage during or directly after migration are transferred to later decades of life.

Microsystem resources

Within the microsystem several adversities were identified by immigrants themselves. Chapter 2 participants often mentioned that their personal happiness and health were important preconditions for placing themselves on a specific rung of the societal ladder. Personal resources such as income, occupation and education were similarly mentioned but the importance of these aspects was sometimes downplayed. Interestingly, while the level of income, educational status, and occupational status were considered to be significant parts of their social position, many immigrants regarded these criteria not the only denominators of their social position. When immigrants evaluated happiness and physical well-being as unfavourable, they tended to place themselves lower on the societal ladder. In line with quantitative findings, health and well-being were an integral part of immigrant's own evaluation of later life (Cramm & Nieboer, 2017).

In Chapter 3, I found that mastery appeared to be a buffer in the relationship between gait speed and physical impairment in the Turkish population but not in the Moroccan population. This is surprising given Moroccan immigrants on average scored higher on mastery than Turkish immigrants. It might be that mastery has a protective effect in certain contexts but not in others. For example, Slotman and colleagues (2017) found that mastery played a moderating role in the relationship between discrimination and depression among both Turkish and Moroccan immigrants. A high income failed to provide a protective effect in the relationship between gait speed and disability in both Turkish and Moroccan groups. Connecting this finding to what was found in Chapter 3, where it was found that immigrants sometimes downplay the importance of income, it might be that the resources provided by income may be not widely accessed in the context of impairment. Another explanation is that in a context where income is generally low, income level does not differentiate much between individuals.

In Chapter 4, I investigated the protective effect of religious coping in the relationship between having limited access to physical, socioeconomic and social resources and well-being. In contrast to the expectations, religious coping did not provide a buffer in the context of having limited access to resources. Religious coping was even negatively associated with well-being among individuals with few resources. Religious coping in general was positively associated with well-being for the population as a whole. As such, religious coping might have a positive effect on well-being but not a compensatory effect in the context of having limited resources (Luthar, 1993). In Chapter 2 it is reported that religion was often mentioned in the context of social position. Particularly, living according to the rules of the religion was important for many Turkish and Moroccan immigrants. I found that some immigrants placed themselves higher on the societal ladder whenever they complied to religious rules including performing a *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) or *Zakat* (give money, food or clothing to the poor) (Khan & Watson, 2006). In addition, others found the commonly held belief among Moroccan immigrants that ‘good Muslims do not have problems’ (Smits et al., 2005). Therefore, an explanation for the finding that religious coping negatively impacted on well-being in the context of limited physical, social and socioeconomic resources, is that having few resources hampers the possibilities to live a life according to the religious rules. As a consequence, in the context where individuals cannot live according to the religious rules, religious coping may actually enhance rather than relieve feelings of guilt and stress.

Mesosystem

Within the mesosystem, I found several important adversities. In Chapter 2 in which immigrant’s own perception of their social position was investigated, I found that immigrants often mentioned an ‘ideal’ picture of what their family situation ought to be. This picture

included the presence of a spouse and in some cases also the presence of children and grandchildren. Furthermore, participants mentioned that it was important to them that they were appreciated by others. Again, when all these aspects were evaluated favourably, immigrants often positioned themselves higher in the social hierarchy than when these aspects were evaluated unfavourably.

In Chapter 3, I investigated the buffering qualities of social contact frequency, that is the number of times immigrants had contact with friends, family and other network members. I investigated this in the transition from physical impairments to disability, with the assumption that a higher contact frequency may enhance a sense of fulfilling important social roles in the presence of impairment (Mendes de Leon, Gold, Glass, Kaplan, & George, 2001). This, in turn, might enhance the motivation to perform tasks of daily living. I found that contact frequency did not have a protective effect in this relationship. Keeping in mind the findings in Chapter 2, perhaps an explanation is that immigrants valued the quality rather than the quantity of social contacts (Mendes de Leon et al., 2001). For example, in the context of health and employment, Slootjes, Saharso, and Keuzenkamp (2018) found that close social ties and having a high proportion of co-ethnics in the network were protective among individuals with a Moroccan origin whereas quantity of contacts did not make a difference. In addition, none of the network measures, including contact quantity, were protective among individuals with Turkish origin in the same study. As such, a measure of contact frequency in general might not be able to detect positive effects of contacts because immigrants benefit only from good quality relationships.

Exosystem

In Chapter 2, immigrants mentioned no criteria for their social position that can be situated in the exosystem, namely the system that encompasses entities and organisations that might be accessed by the individual or their families. In Chapter 4, I similarly found no support for the idea that resources situated in the exosystem were beneficial for the resilience of immigrants. In this chapter there was neither support for the idea that public religious activities were positively associated to well-being nor that they provided a buffer against the negative effect of having limited resources on well-being. This was against my prior expectation, given that other studies on the topic show that public activities are beneficial for people's well-being (Fry, 2000; Taylor, Chatters, & Jackson, 2007), and this is even more the case when studies examine ethnic minorities (Nguyen et al., 2013). An explanation is that support that are normally accessed through religious activities by other ethnic populations are obtained from other sources by Turkish and Moroccan immigrants. Such sources may be support of family members (Idler & Kasl, 1997) or ethnic identity (Assari, 2013).

Macrosystem

In the macrosystem I found several relevant resources and adversities. In Chapter 2, I found that societal conditions relating to integration into society were mentioned by immigrants as a means to place themselves on the societal ladder. Some participants reported that they felt fearful and unfamiliar with Dutch society in the initial years after migration. Particularly, that they could not speak Dutch hampered their independence. For this reason, they often placed themselves lower on the societal ladder. Other participants mentioned that they detected an increased hostility towards them from the Dutch in the course of their lives. For this reason, they placed themselves lower on the societal ladder.

In Chapter 5, I investigated immigrant's resilience across four life-stages via semi-structured interviews. Findings revealed an enduring linkage between societal conditions, migration and resilience. Particularly, two societal conditions influence the resilience of the individual. First, during the second life-stage that I termed the *maintaining settlement* stage, which occurred in early adulthood when many participants were starting their families, participants mentioned that they experienced increasing difficulties with finding a job. This was in contrast with the stage before, the *settling into the host society* stage, where participants mentioned that jobs were readily available. Indeed, this particular point in the life stage coincided with the halting of the economic growth in the 1970s during the oil crisis (Guiraudon, 2014). Immigrants who were 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 life-time, often through educational attainment, also were equipped to deal with this societal change.

A second moment that societal conditions influenced immigrant's resilience happened during the last life stages which I termed *restructuring life after retirement* and a *dependency* stage. The *restructuring life after retirement* stage could be characterized by the Third Age, derived from Laslett (1987). During this stage participants were retired, free of parental responsibilities. During the subsequent *dependency* stage, participants reached an age of physical dependence as their health had declined significantly. This stage was similar to the Fourth Age (Laslett, 1987). During these latter stages, participants mentioned increasing perceptions of discrimination and no longer feeling welcome. This was often experienced in a negative way and left its mark on some participants. This may reflect the increased moral panic towards immigrants with an Islamic background (Vasta, 2007) and a pressure to assimilate (Prins, 2002). The results reflect how this development shaped the experience of ageing in a migration context, namely by devaluing the participants' contribution to society. Immigrants managed 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 were resources for resilience during *restructuring* and *dependency* stages.

Chronosystem

In line with Carvin and colleagues (2014), I found that resilience across the life course varied for the immigrants in our study. Particularly in Chapter 5, I found 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 were useful for participants in early stages – i.e., ‘taking advantage of newfound freedom’ and ‘resigning to the situation’ – were not so useful in later stages of life. Participants who used these resources experienced difficulties when they had not accumulated other social and economic resources during early adulthood. As such, these participants had few resources available during older ages. When reaching the stage, they often found themselves alone with few social contacts and many functional limitations. There were also resources that were particularly useful in later stages – i.e., ‘having made sustainable investments’ and ‘participating in family life’ – but increased the stress in earlier stages, when participants felt they lost status after migration and missed their families. If participants accumulated resources of family formation and building up a financial reserve during the *maintaining settlement* stage this opened up opportunities for financing regular visits to the country of origin in the *restructuring life post retirement* stage or social support from children in the *dependency* stage.

Two resources remained important throughout the life course (Chapter 5). These included educational attainment in the country of origin and the social network including family and the community. The resource of educational attainment in the country of origin aligns with what Sloopjes et al. (2017) has termed ‘transferrable resources’. These are the resources that immigrants acquire before migration and remain useful in the years after migration. I found that participants had a much easier time obtaining language skills when they had some education prior to their migration than when they did not. In addition, an educational background importantly facilitated social mobility during the *maintaining settlement* stage and resulted in an accumulation of resources during the *restructuring life post-retirement* stage. Social networks also helped immigrants throughout the life stages in different ways. For example, I found that intergenerational family relationships, in particular children, compensated for difficulties with language and provided company. Intergenerational relationships were also mentioned in the context of pride and a sense of purpose, giving meaning to the decision to migrate.

Interactions between systems in immigrant's resilience

In Chapter 3 and 4 I used an 'a priori' approach to resilience (Cosco et al., 2016) and in Chapter 2 and 5 I used a 'resilience across the life course' approach (Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2008). Connecting the findings, both approaches showed how resources in different systems interacted to improve or hamper resilience. I highlight three important examples.

In Chapter 4, it was found that religious coping was ineffective in ameliorating the negative effect of having limited resources on well-being. In fact, it even enhanced the negative effect of limited resources on well-being. In Chapter 5, however, religion was mentioned as an important resource by participants themselves. This contrasting finding might be explained in two ways. First, both studies might have referred to different 'protective qualities' of religion. Where the quantitative study focused on turning to God in times of crisis, the qualitative study focused on religion in the context of meaning making. As such, those aspects might have different protective qualities. Second, it might be that protective factors work in one context of an adversity and an outcome but not in others. Indeed, another study that was conducted in the same immigrant populations investigated resilience in context of disability with the outcome of well-being. In this context, religious coping did provide a protective effect ameliorating the negative effect of disability on the outcome of well-being (Szabó, Klokgieters, Kok, van Tilburg, & Huisman, 2019).

In Chapter 3, I found no confirmation that contact frequency provided a buffer in the context of impairment leading to disability. In chapter 4, I found that contact frequency was not a significant contributor to the constellation of socioeconomic, physical and social resources. Rather the number of people in the household and marital status were important social contributors and when resources were lacking they also significantly hampered well-being. In the meso- and macrosystem, immigrants used definitions of what family situation 'ought to be' in order to place themselves on the societal ladder. Therefore, immigrants might have compared their situation with an ideal situation (Buitelaar, 2006; Uğurlu, Türkoğlu, & Kuzlak, 2018). They, therefore, may not have valued a sheer number of social contacts.

In Chapter 3, I found that income was an important resource among Dutch in the context of impairment leading to disability but not among the Turkish and Moroccan immigrants. This might be explained by broader social value systems on the level of the macrosystem. In Chapter 2, I found that immigrants often downplay the importance of income. Some participants refused to identify any socioeconomic circumstances for societal placement arguments because they argued that money, wealth and power are unimportant in life and they based their position on happiness and moral justice instead. As such, it might be that broader cultural value systems that value certain qualities over others play an important role in the effectiveness of certain protective factors. For resilience this is relevant because culture shapes the availability and accessibility of facilitative resources necessary to sustain

their well-being under stress. For example, internal qualities such as temperament differ in their availability because different cultural contexts may value or diminish in importance specific characteristics encouraging the individual to deny him or herself this particular way of self-expression (Chen & Wang, 2006). Similarly, income might have a contradictory role among Turkish and Moroccan immigrants.

These findings shed light on questions of whether findings of resilience in one population could be transferred to another population (Smith & Hayslip, 2012). This draws attention to the fact that future studies that use the 'a priori' approach to resilience should be very careful in seeking out the risk and outcome context in which they study resilience because this may influence which protective factors have a positive effect. The social ecology model of Bronfenbrenner highlights that protective factors do not operate in a vacuum. Rather they operate in broader systems that interact with each other in different micro-, meso-, exo-, chrono-, and macrosystems. Based on these findings one would expect that protective factors might not be transferrable. Therefore the 'a priori' approaches should consider several systems in order to answer questions that ask how useful protective factors are in particular contexts. Future studies on resilience should assess in which contexts protective factors help resilience and in which contexts resilience is hampered.

Methodological considerations

In this dissertation both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used. These methods offered both advantages and disadvantages. In this section I focus on the strengths and limitations of using both datasets.

From all immigrants in the Netherlands, only Turkish and Moroccan immigrants living in the Netherlands were included in this study. I argued that the combination of migration and ageing related adversities make them of interest to the study of resilience. There were indeed occasions where I detected heterogeneity in disability, well-being and the experience of social position. Furthermore, I showed how Turkish and Moroccan immigrants fostered resilience by using resources from different domains. These resources allowed them to deal with migration and ageing related adversities. Yet, first-generation Turkish and Moroccan immigrants and their wives are part of a social category that will disappear in the future. Data from statistics Netherlands (2017) shows a declining trend in numbers of first-generation immigrants older than 55 starting from 2050. At the same time, the number of second- and third-generation individuals in the age group above 55 is increasing (Statistics Netherlands, 2017). Prognosis indicates that in 2060 there will be over 400,000 individuals of Turkish and Moroccan descent above 55 living in the Netherlands. An important question, thus, becomes whether the findings of this study can be used to understand how these generations can

become resilient when they age. These generations did not experience migration the same way as their parents did. Hence, the same adversities might not apply to their lives. For example, they did not have to find their way into a country that was largely unfamiliar to them. Yet, some of the adversities faced by them might hold similarities. From studies in the U.S., we know that many health and social problems remain over generations as a consequence of having a minority position and on average low socioeconomic position (Acevedo-Garcia, Bates, Osypuk, & McArdle, 2010; Nazroo, Jackson, Karlsen, & Torres, 2007). Furthermore, it has been shown that second generation immigrants in the Netherlands are confronted with discrimination and segregation (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2006). This in turn might lead to depression and other adverse health outcomes. The current dissertation teaches that it is important to invest in sustainable resources such as education and social networks before dependency stages of older age begin. Furthermore, it confronts linkages between public opinion and ageing in that this is crucial once an individual becomes physically dependent on others.

It should be noted that despite efforts to include as many participants as possible, the sample is still relatively small with relatively low cooperation rates (i.e. 50 percent for Turkish immigrants and 40 percent for Moroccan immigrants). Similarly, for the qualitative study over half of the participants who were approached refused to partake in an interview. For the quantitative data it is difficult to tell whether there are systematic reasons for non-cooperation because we have no information on the persons who refused to participate. For the qualitative data, we know that refusals often stemmed from distrust about privacy or simply having no time to or priority for participating in an interview. At the same time, I noted that there was large variation in the stories of the participants that I interviewed. There were very disadvantaged socially isolated individuals as well as very advantaged individuals. As such, based on my experience in the field, I believe that I was able to acquire a diverse population.

Another point is that all the studies were cross-sectional, which limits causal inference. Although a strong theoretical model implied that the causal direction is from impairments to disability (Deeg & Huisman, 2010; Mendes de Leon et al., 2001; Pearlin et al., 2007) and having access to limited resources towards well-being (Halleröd & Seldén, 2013), there might be aspects that are affected by changes over time. Some outcomes such as disability and well-being might fluctuate over time. In addition, individuals might be caught at a moment that they had been dealing with some of the disadvantages for longer periods of time. In these cases, reduction of stress may be a gradual process, which was not completed yet. For the qualitative study it should be noted that we asked participants to narrate past experiences. In hindsight recalled experiences may appear different to the participant or might be told differently than what they actually were (Gardner, 2002). Experiences mentioned are narrated from the perspective of how participants evaluate them now, not how they have evaluated the experience in earlier life stages.

A third and last point, is that both the quantitative and qualitative data used translated versions of the interview. For the quantitative data, as much as possible translated and validated scales were used in order to limit problems with validity (Braam et al., 2010; Spijker et al., 2004). Where these scales were unavailable, professional translators were used who were checked by bilingual translators (Spijker et al., 2004), in order to make translations as accurate as possible. In the qualitative study I tackled this issue using several strategies partially informed by prior research (Suurmond, Woudstra, & Essink-Bot, 2016). First, research-assistants were hired who were familiar with the research method and where informed on the specific goals of the study. Second, the topic list and potential probing questions were translated beforehand and profoundly discussed in order to come to an agreement upon the translation. Third, interviews were rapidly translated and transcribed in order to check the role of the interpreter fresh from memory, which was then discussed with other researchers in the team.

Conclusion

On the outset of this thesis I emphasized the disadvantaged and adverse position of Turkish and Moroccan older adults living in the Netherlands. Studying these immigrants through the lens of resilience brings out many of the complexities of growing old in a migration context. Although many experiences of disadvantage and hardship have been confirmed in the chapters, I have shown that there is variation in outcomes and resilience within and between Turkish and Moroccan immigrants. Resilience is not only maintained and managed by the individual. Rather it is a process which develops and interacts on various micro-, meso-, exo-, chrono- and macrosystems. Where an individual is situated both in historical time as well as in geographical locations plays a crucial role in whether and how resilience can be achieved. I conclude that resilience encompasses all responses through which individuals act, either as active participants of migration or through coping mechanisms imbricated in the wider migration processes of their families and communities. The importance of resources is dependent on the total number of resources available to an individual, the type of resources available and the context in which the resources were used. Resilient immigrants are able to accumulate financial, social and other resources across life stages, whereas less resilient immigrants failed to acquire them in earlier life stages. In my study resources that promote resilience were being educated, dealing with language barriers, having two incomes, making life meaningful, strong social and community networks, and the ability to sustain a transnational lifestyle traveling back and forth to the country of origin. In doing so, this dissertation contributes to a more complete picture of the functioning variability within Turkish and Moroccan immigrants.

