Family Cohesion as a Mediator Variable in the Relationship between Belonging to Homeland and Needs Satisfaction among a Sample of Saudi University Students

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Abstract. membership in social groups represents an important role in human lives as it defines the norms and values that determine which behaviors are, and are not acceptable. One of the groups that conveys many norms and values through its cultural specificity is the family.

This study focuses on defining the relationship between Belonging to Homeland and needs satisfaction. The role of family cohesion was included in the study as the potential mediator of this relationship, since family plays an important role in both early socialization and satisfying needs.

An invitation to participate was disseminated online using mailing lists and social media sites to young Saudi women. The questionnaires of Basic Psychological Needs Scale, Belonging to Homeland and Social Cohesion Subscale from the FACES III Questionnaire were filled by 212 Saudi Arab female students ($M_{age} = 22.11$), Data were analyzed in *R*.

The results revealed that more positive opinion on Saudi Arabia and more participation in its socio-political life were related with higher satisfaction of needs, which was partly mediated by family cohesion. Age and marital status were not related to any of the relevant constructs.

Keywords: Loyalty to the country , family cohesion , needs satisfaction, university students, Saudi .

Introduction

A sense of belonging represents one of the important drivers of human existence. As Buss (2012:145) explains, back in the Stone Age when people used to live in small groups surrounded by predators, belonging to a specific group was a crucial survival strategy. Nowadays, although the environment is much safer and people can easily survive on their own, belonging to a specific group remains included in different approaches to human motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000:228; Kenrick, 2013: 2340; Maslow, 1943:374). In modern times, individuals are simultaneously members of many groups, which can influence their decisions and behaviors. According to Tajfel and Turner (2004:278), group memberships define social identities, which in turn define the norms and values individuals are expected to respect in exchange for earning or retaining group membership. Identification with group norms and values makes an individual a part of "something larger," i.e., the group of individuals sharing beliefs, attitudes and emotions, which represent important resources for psychological wellbeing (Vogler, 2000:19) and resilience (Jones & Jetten, 2011:163). The stronger the social identity within an

individual, the more influence it has on that individual (Crisp, Heuston, Farr, & Turner, 2007:12). One social identity is national identity, the pervasive sense of subjective attachment to a country (Huddy & Khatib, 2007:63), which can impose many values and restrictions (Pollis, 1992:180), but can also elicit strong emotions, which is probably easiest to observe in large sporting events (Jones, Coffee, Sheffield, Yangüez, & Barker, 2012:163; Mehus & Kolstad, 2011:839). As Mercer (2014:515) concludes, emotions are related to identities, and group-level emotions can be even more powerful than those experienced by individuals alone.

With their role as relevant resources, groups can also help individuals in satisfying their needs. One of the first recognized concepts relating to human motivation was "needs." In the context of positive psychology, Self-determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000:237-255) is a focal point with respect to human motivation, as it describes three basic human needs: autonomy, defined as the tendency towards self-organization; competence, defined as the need to achieve motor, cognitive and social growth (and success); and relatedness, defined as the tendency to achieve contact and connection with other people. As Ryan and Deci (2000:244) posit, needs can be differentiated from desires, as absence of desire does not have a detrimental effect on wellbeing, while inadequately satisfied needs do. Therefore, lack of relatedness, for instance, can be expected to directly diminish wellbeing. The Self-determination Theory authors also noticed that need satisfaction is required for both human wellbeing and growth, which indicates the long-term positive effects produced by the satisfaction of needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000:264). Cultural context may affect specific needs, "depending on the degree to which individuals have been able to integrate the [various cultural] values and goals with their own sense

of self" (Deci & Ryan, 2000:. 247). In other words, people whose values are not in line with those of their cultural background, or whose social identities do not stem from this background may have less chances of satisfying their needs in socially acceptable ways. Perhaps the clearest examples of this conflict of values come from organizational psychology, in the form of the person-environment fit, defined as the congruence between an individual and his environment (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011:3-50), which also has many positive effects on an employee's wellbeing and efficiency, and which also implies negative consequences deriving from its lack. A newer construct, person-group fit, also reveals that better fit is related to more social cohesion and better work outcomes (Seong, Kristof-Brown, Park, Hong & Shin, 2015: 1184-1213). Taken together, these studies imply that contextual factors, such as restrictions conveyed by social identities like national identity, may promote or undermine an individual's chances of satisfying his/her needs, or growing and reaching desired levels of wellbeing.

Social identities are usually attained in the process of socialization (Demo & Hughes, 1990: 365; Ochs, 1993:301), the primary role of which belongs to the family, as this group of individuals live with a child and participate in his or her childhood (Bales & Parsons, 1956:84). The effects of this, which can last even during the adulthood (Cohen-Scali, 2003:241), span from accepting specific coping strategies (Kliewer, Fearnow & Miller, 1996: 2344) to adopting particular moral attitudes (White, 2000:76) and gender roles (Anyan & Hjemdal, 2018: 549). One of the relevant components that allows attitudes and behaviors to be translated from one generation to another is family cohesion. White (2000:87) for instance, has shown that individuals with more cohesive families perceive their families as moral authorities, while Anyan and

Hjemdal (2018: 548-564) found that the relationship between stress at home and anxiety and depression is mediated by family cohesion. These findings simultaneously suggest positive and negative effects of family cohesion (and its insufficiency) on the wellbeing and growth of an individual. Family cohesion also builds a framework by which traditional values, including a strong sense of belonging to a country, may supersede the family as a representation of moral authority, and be integrated into an individual's self-concept by processes related to family cohesion. This, in statistical terms, means that family cohesion could moderate the relationship between a person feeling that he or she belongs to a country and the satisfaction of his or her basic psychological needs. This relation provides the focus of this study.

Additional values of this study lie in the previously mentioned contextual dependency of national identity stemming from the fact that each nation conveys specific sets of values and patterns of acceptable behaviors (Hofstede, 2011). This study is explicitly focused on the Saudi Arabian national identity and those who seem to have an unfavorable position due to the traditional values it conveys – women. According to the Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2018), with only 12.9% female parliament members and less than 17% of women in the labor force, Saudi Arabia still has many steps to take in order to achieve gender equality. Although the situation has been changing during the last decade and women's rights have greatly improved in comparison with the period before 2010, women are still in an unfavorable position compared to men, especially when certain elements of Sharia law are considered. Women therefore represent a sample to which traditional Saudi social identity may have been transferred by socialization, that may also have had certain restrictions imposed upon them regarding their freedoms. On a more abstract level, this study may test the relationship between needs satisfaction and national identity on a sample whose rights are somewhat deprived, which makes it even more relevant as a subject to study.

Research questions

This study focused on determining the relationship between belonging to a country (in terms of strength of national identity), family cohesion and needs satisfaction, as well as how that relationship related to the age and marital status of the participants. Next to this bivariate relationship, another goal of this study was to test family cohesion as the mediator between belonging to a country and needs satisfaction.

Methods

Participants

The purposive sample collected for this study comprised 212 female students at one university in Saudi Arabia. On average, they were 22.11 years old (SD = 3.21); a majority (n = 172, 88.13%) were unmarried, with only two divorced participants.

Instruments

1- *The Basic Psychological Needs Scale (Deci et al., 2001)* : was used to operationalize how satisfied the participants' basic psychological needs were. In the original version, the scale consisted of 21 items: eight for relatedness, seven for autonomy and six for competence. Participants were supposed to express their level of agreement with the presented statements ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), where higher values indicated higher levels of need satisfaction. However, the results of the conducted CFA (with robust maximum likelihood estimator according to Brosseau-Liard and Savalei's 2014 approach) on that model revealed that the data did not fit the original three-factor model ($\chi^2(186)$ = 898.97, p < 0.001, robust CFI = 0.434, robust RMSEA = 0.13, SRMR = 0.11). Nor did it fit an

adapted four-factor solution (Johnston & Finney, 2010) as this model failed to converge even with different optimization settings. Therefore, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the scale, with a MAP test as a method of revealing the optimal number of factors. In the preprocessing step, a MSA score was calculated for each item in order to exclude items of low sampling adequacy. After excluding such items, the conducted MAP test revealed that one-factor solution would represent the optimal fit to the remaining items. Therefore, a single component was extracted using the PCA and saved in the regression form. These scores were used in the following analyses.

2- *Family cohesion was operationalized with the cohesion subscale of the FACES III Questionnaire (Olson, Porter & Lavee, 1985)*: This subscale has a theoretical single-factor structure consisting of 10 statements related to different cohesive behaviors. Participants were to state the extent to which they agreed with these statements, ranging from 1 to 5, with higher values indicating a higher level of agreement (i.e., greater family cohesion). The results of the conducted CFA (with a robust maximum likelihood estimator according to Brosseau-Liard and Savalei's 2014 approach) indicated a marginally unacceptable fit ($\chi^2(35)$ = 146.65, p <0 .001, robust CFI = 0.854, robust RMSEA =0.12, SRMR = 0.07). Therefore, modification indices were consulted in order to see if there were any correlated residuals among the items. After correlating the residuals between items three and eight, four and seven and two and four, the fit improved ($\chi^2(32)$ = 86.46, $p < 0.001$, robust CFI = 0.931, robust RMSEA = 0.09, SRMR = 0.06), indicating that a single-factor solution fits the scale, while the correlated residuals indicated the space for its improvements. A similar situation was found in other validations (Forjaz, Cano, & Cervera-Enguix, 2002). In line with the first questionnaire, the single

component was extracted via PCA and the scores were saved in the regression form.

3- *Belonging to Saudi Arabia was measured with the Belonging to Homeland Scale (El Keshky, in press)*: This scale consists of 40 items (statements) to which participants provide an estimate of how much they agree with them on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Although the author of the scale described its internal structure as reliable (Cronbach α = 0.83), the CFA (with Brosseau-Liard and Savalei (2014) corrected ML as estimator) failed to confirm the single-factor structure of this scale ($\chi^2(740)$ = 3286.20, $p < 0.001$, robust CFI = 0.530, robust RMSEA = 0.12, SRMR = 0.11), which indicated the need to conduct an EFA to discover the underlying structure of items. After repeating the procedure described with the BPNS, application of the MAP test on the remaining items revealed a three-factor structure. The first of the three factors, named superiority, reflects the items related to claiming that Saudi Arabia is the supreme country in the world in many ways. The second factor focuses on the individual's participation in socio-political life and activities in Saudi Arabia. The third factor relates to consideration of different residential alternatives to Saudi Arabia and a more critical view of patriotism. These scores were saved in the regression form and used in further analyses.

Procedure

To achieve a larger outreach and attract as many potential participants as possible, the study was conducted online and participants were invited via mailing lists and social networks to take part in it. The invitation contained the information that the focus of this study was female in order to deter men from filling in the questionnaires. Before participation in the study, the participants were informed of their right to refuse or quit filling the questionnaire at any point in time without

any consequences. They were also informed that the participation was voluntary, and no financial or other reward would be provided as compensation. They were also instructed about the relevant ethical issues such as anonymity and the data protection approach of the study (Flick, 2015). After being presented with this content, participants had the option to choose if they would participate in the study and, in that case, provide basic socio-demographic data (age and gender). Although interested male potential participants were instructed not to participate, the option to choose male gender was available as a control to observe if any men disobeyed the instruction. However, the data suggested that no men entered the study. The participants first completed the Belonging to Homeland Questionnaire, followed by the Family Cohesion Questionnaire and finally the Basic Psychological Needs Questionnaire.

Statistical analyses

This study used *R* as the main analytical tool. To specify, the packages *lavaan* (Rosseel, 2012:1-36), *semTools* (Jorgensen et al., 2018), *Hmisc* (Harrell, 2019) and *psych* (Revelle, 2018) were used applied to evaluate factor structures, and test the relationships of the obtained factors in terms of correlations and path analyses.
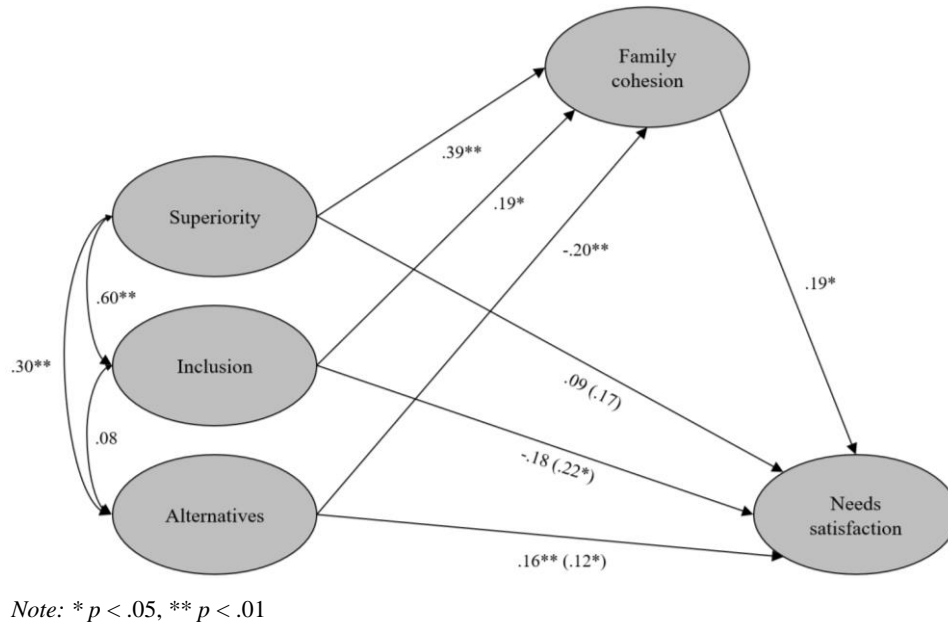
Results

This section briefly describes the results of the conducted analyses. The table of correlations (Table 1) reveals the bivariate relationships between the constructs of interest, followed by regression analyses and test of mediation. Scores obtained by dimension reduction techniques described in the Instruments sub-section of Methods were used in the applied analyses. Since only two participants were divorced, which is insufficient for any sensible data analysis, they were excluded from the following statistical procedures, while the marital status was recoded in a way that a higher value indicates married participants.

Table (1).Correlations between needs satisfaction, marital status, age, cohesion and indicators of belonging to a country for on a female Saudi sample after the Bonferroni adjustment (*N* = 210)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
(1) needs	1						
(2) marital status	0.01	1					
(3) age	-0.02	0.38**	1				
(4) cohesion	0.30**	-0.05	-0.04	1			
(5) superiority	0.33**	0.08	0.08	0.44**	1		
(6) inclusion	0.33**	-0.01	-0.02	0.41**	0.60**	1	
(7) alternatives	0.19*	0.16	0.16	-0.08	0.30**	0.08	1

*$p_{adj} < 0.05$, **$p_{adj} < 0.01$

Table 1 provides answers to several of the set research questions. Firstly, it shows that individuals who are more connected with their family, believe Saudi Arabia is one of the best countries in the world. Those who actively participate in the social activities in Saudi Arabia and those who consider its alternatives also achieve higher scores in needs satisfaction. Apart from the usual finding that older participants are more likely to be

married, with none of the other variables having a significant relationship with any of these two, the table also suggests that individuals coming from more cohesive families are also more included in the socio-political activities of Saudi Arabia and perceive Saudi Arabia as one of the best places to live. The inclusion and positive opinion of the country were also positively related, although belief in Saudi Arabia' superiority

was also positively related in considering its alternatives. No relationship between considering alternative places to live and being involved into socio-political life of Saudi Arabia were found. Taken together, these findings indicate that variations in needs

satisfaction could be explained by cohesion, superiority of Saudi Arabia and inclusion into the socio-political life. In order to assess if the latter two relationships are mediated by the first, a regression model was formed (Figure 1).

Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01

Figure (1). Standardized regression coefficients of the model testing the role of family cohesion as the mediator between belonging to a country and needs satisfaction

The results of the conducted path analysis reveal that in this specific model, Figure 1, inclusion in socio-political activities plays the most important role in prediction of needs satisfaction. However, the role of superiority should not be excluded as the relatively high correlation it has with inclusion, which emerged as a stronger predictor, might have hindered its effectiveness. On the other hand, a relationship between considering alternatives and needs satisfaction was found, although it was somewhat weak and would probably not emerge as significant if any of the stricter corrections applied. While all three of the relationships are significant at $p < 0.10$, only the slopes of inclusion and alternatives reached the threshold of significance in this model. A relationship between family cohesion and

needs satisfaction was also found, although it was quite weak. Altogether, these four predictors explained 17.7% of variance of needs satisfaction.

Family cohesion was also tested as the mediator between belonging to a country and needs satisfaction, and it revealed different complex relationships. Firstly, the indirect path from inclusion to needs satisfaction was insignificant (indirect $\beta = 0.04$, $p = 0.059$), indicating that family cohesion does not mediate this relationship. On the other hand, the indirect path between superiority and needs satisfaction was significant (indirect $\beta = 0.08$, $p = 0.044$), yet the direct path was not, which would, according to Baron and Kenny (1986), mean that true mediation did not occur. Although the indirect path between

alternatives and needs satisfaction was significant (indirect β = -0.04, *p* = 0.038), its sign implied that the relationship is an inconsistent mediation or suppression.

In order to test the robustness of these findings, three additional regression models were computed, with family cohesion being tested as the mediator of each of the belonging variables individually. In these models (Figure 2), family cohesion emerged as a significant partial mediator of the relationship between superiority and needs satisfaction (indirect β = 0.08, *p* = 0.023) and inclusion and needs satisfaction (indirect β = 0.08, *p* = 0.028), while family cohesion failed to suppress the relationship between alternatives and needs satisfaction (indirect β = -0.02, *p* = 0.378).
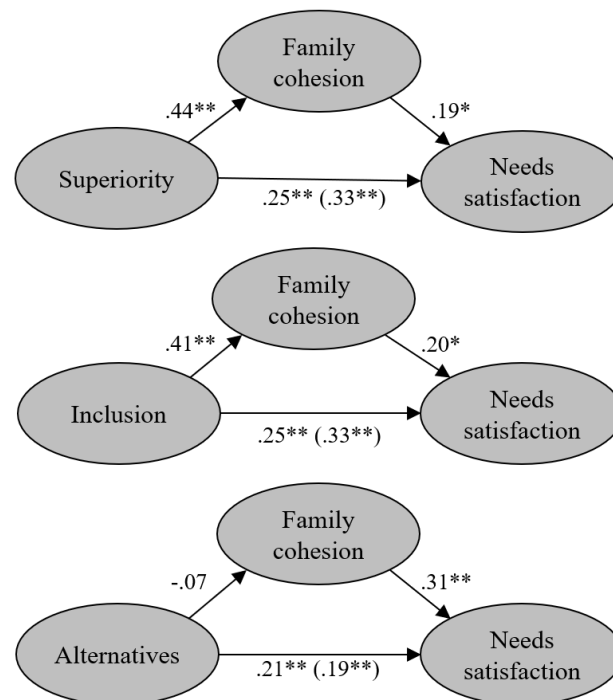
Figure (2). Additional models testing the role of family cohesion as the mediator between belonging to a country and needs satisfaction

The results indicate that although family cohesion does not mediate the relationship between belonging to a country and needs satisfaction in a full model, when that model is separated into components, family cohesion functions as a partial mediator between needs satisfaction as the criterion, and superiority and inclusion as predictors.

Discussion

The results of this study provided several clear answers on the set research questions. Regarding the bivariate relationships, age and marital status did not significantly correlate with needs satisfaction nor dimensions of belonging to a country, indicating that both married and unmarried women achieved similar scores on the scales. The finding that marital status was not correlated with needs satisfaction is not in line with a previous study which found that married students were least happy (Alshehri et al., 2016: 111-114). However, as the sample for that study consisted of 605 participants, 2.4% (14) of whom were married, such an estimate of happiness may be unreliable. Due to the fact that both samples used by Alshehri and

associates (2016) and the sample used in this study were purposive and consist of students who, according to the OECD (2017:121) make up approximately one quarter of the Saudi population, it is questionable if the results obtained by these studies can be generalized to the rest of the population. The finding that age is not significantly related to any of the relevant constructs is not surprising since this sample consisted dominantly of young participants (20-23 years), so the outcomes of this study do not imply that age would not emerge as a significant predictor if older participants had also been included in the study.

Regarding the bivariate relationships between needs satisfaction and national identity, defined as the sense of belonging to a country, the newly formed factor structures indicate that considering Saudi Arabia the best country in the world and participating in its socio-political activities are intertwined and both positively correlate with needs satisfaction. In general, this confirms the statement made by Deci and Ryan (2000) that individuals who adapt cultural norms and values into their identity generally feel that their needs are more adequately satisfied, in line with the concepts of the person-environment (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011) and person-group fits (Seong et al., 2015:1209). As mentioned before, groups may represent a powerful resource (Jones & Jetten, 2011), the power of which rises as social identity strengthens (Crisp et al., 2007:19). Despite the limitations it conveys, which may have detrimental effects on needs satisfaction (Pollis, 1992:183), it seems that Saudi national identity conveys many positive resources that may diminish several of its drawbacks. Naming these positive resources would be an interesting subject for future studies. After taking into account the fact that this was not a causal research design, but a correlational study, the calculated regression line also indicates that

women opposed to the norms and values that Saudi national identity promotes on average have lower wellbeing than the ones who accept it. This may also mean that women who do not believe they are treated fairly have decategorized themselves as Saudis, which represents a problem since favorable attitudes towards Saudi Arabia are related to higher participation in its socio-political life. In other words, a portion of the population that may be the most vulnerable to the current situation may have excluded themselves from socio-political activities, which represent a legitimate way of achieving social change, which in the context of Saudi Arabia would mean higher gender equality. This was also found in another culture (Huddy & Khatib, 2007:66).

On the other hand, considering alternatives to Saudi Arabia as a country of residence also exhibited a weak, but positive relationship with needs satisfaction. Although these findings, if taken together, could be interpreted as contrary as both positive ideation of Saudi Arabia and criticism of it are positively related to needs satisfaction, these findings may also suggest the presence of subgroups within the data: one subgroup may exhibit a positive relationship between the superiority of Saudi Arabia and inclusion in its life and needs satisfaction; while another subgroup may experience a positive relationship between considering alternatives and needs satisfaction. Also, having acceptable and reachable alternatives represents a relevant factor of resilience, which is known to be negatively correlated with depression and anxiety (Poole, Dobson and Pusch, 2017:89-100). Therefore, the positive relationship between alternatives and needs satisfaction may also represent a form of resilience. However, further studies are required to more precisely define these relationships.

The finding that family cohesion was positively related to needs satisfaction is not

surprising as relatedness is one of the basic psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Next to social support provided by the family being a relevant resource in times of need (Anyan & Hjemdal, 2018), the characteristics of the sample should also be taken into account. Since the sample consisted of young female students, their relationships with their family (and support they receive) may still be quite strong. On the other hand, married participants have new families in which they play the roles of wives and/or mothers, which conveys a dose of both new joys and worries. Regardless of whether the focus is on the primary (where the participants grew up) or secondary (formed with their partners) families, in line with other studies, the results have confirmed that family members can have a significant impact on needs satisfaction of an individual (North, Holahan, Moos, & Cronkite, 2008; Onyishi & Okongwu, 2013).

While the joint model failed to exhibit any meaningful interactive effects, the three specific mediation models revealed that family cohesion is the partial mediator between superiority of both Saudi Arabia and need satisfaction, and inclusion and need satisfaction. This is not a surprising finding either, as family members are the primary socializers of children (Bales and Parsons, 1956) and may be perceived as moral authorities even in the adulthood (White, 2000). Therefore, the respect for Saudi values and norms may actually reflect respect for family values and norms, which explains the intervening role of family cohesion in the relationship between national identity and needs satisfaction. This is also supported at the level of the three obtained factors, as the factor focused on a critical view on Saudi Arabia – called "alternatives" in the scope of this study – was not significantly related to family cohesion. However, it should also be noticed that family cohesion served only as the partial mediator between superiority, inclusion and needs satisfaction, which implies that the family cohesion is not solely responsible for these relationships.

Several practical limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. Firstly, in line with the previously described conclusion, a purposive sample consisting only of young women was included in this study, which makes it questionable how valid it would be to generalize these results to men or the entire population in general. Furthermore, and also as stated in the previous sections, each culture conveys its own norms and values (Hofstede, 2011). Although individuals tend to conform to the norms and values of the culture they grow up in, some norms and values may hinder the satisfaction of needs. This may pose another risk for generalization of these results outside the Saudi context and calls for future studies, especially in more culturally diverse countries. Moreover, although the satisfaction of the three psychological needs is known to be somewhat correlated (Deci et al., 2001), it might be interesting to develop more culturally appropriate measures that could discriminate between the three needs and consequently lead to more precise results.

Taken together, these results imply that family cohesion plays an important role in the relationship between belonging to a country and satisfaction of psychological needs, as (minor) parts of their relationship could be assigned to family cohesion. This confirms the notion that family plays an important role in both attaining attitudes towards one's own country and satisfaction of needs.

Acknowledgments

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التماسك الأسري كمتغير وسيط في العلاقة بين الانتماء للوطن واشباع الحاجات لدي عينة من طالبات الجامعة السعوديات

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كلية الاداب و العلوم الإنسانيه – قسم علم النفس

مستخلص. تمثل العضوية في المجموعات الاجتماعية دورًا مهمًا في حياة البشر لأنها تحدد القواعد والقيم التي تحدد السلوكيات المقبولة وغير المقبولة. واحدة من المجموعات التي تنقل العديد من القواعد والقيم من خلال خصوصيتها الثقافية هي الأسرة.

تركز هذه الدراسة على تحديد العلاقة بين الانتماء للوطن واشباع الحاجات. تم تضمين دور التماسك الأسري في الدراسة كوسيط محتمل لهذه العلاقة، حيث تلعب الأسرة دورًا مهمًا في كل من التنشئة الاجتماعية المبكرة و تلبية الاحتياجات.

تم نشر دعوة للمشاركة في الدراسة عبر الإنترنت باستخدام القوائم البريدية ومواقع التواصل الاجتماعي على النساء السعوديات. تم ملء مقاييس الحاجات النفسية الأساسية، والانتماء للوطن والتماسك الأسري من قبل (٢١٢) طالبة سعودية متوسط أعمارهن ٢٢,١١ بانحراف معياري ٣,٢١ عاماً، وقد تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام برنامج R .

كشفت النتائج أن الانتماء للوطن و المشاركة في الحياة الاجتماعية والسياسية يرتبطان بإشباع الحاجات الأساسية، وأن التماسك الأسري يلعب دور المتغير الوسيط في هذه العلاقة، وكشفت النتائج أيضا عدم وجود علاقة بين العمر والحالة الزواجية وبين كل من التماسك الأسري والانتماء للوطن واشباع الحاجات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الانتماء للوطن – التماسك الأسري – اشباع الحاجات – طلاب الجامعة– السعودية.