


# The role of perceived discrimination in linking religious practices and well-being: A study among Muslim Afghan refugees in the Netherlands

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Minorities facing adverse intergroup contact can experience both increased identification with their ethnic group and decreased identification with a host majority group. First, we argue it is important to understand what is associated with adversity, particularly in previously overlooked samples. Muslim refugee samples are often treated differently and experience more adversity than other immigrants. Second, we combine insights on the role of religiosity in acculturation with the observation that religiosity may not have positive effects in societies that do not value (a specific) religion (religiosity-as-social-value hypothesis) as well as insights from rejection (dis-)identification models, to understand which domains of being a Muslim are associated with discrimination, (dis-)identification and well-being. We hypothesized that Muslim religious practices, but not beliefs, coping or values, are associated with increased perceived discrimination, and suggest that this is because practices are highly visible. Data from Muslim Afghan refugees in the Netherlands ( $N = 183$ ) revealed that indeed only religious practices were related positively to perceived discrimination. Perceived discrimination in turn mediated the relationship between religious practices and dis-identification with the majority group, as well as the relationship between religious practices and well-being. We suggest that the visibility of one's religious behaviour is relevant for acculturation outcomes.

**Keywords:** Rejection (dis-)identification model; Perceived discrimination; Ethnic identity; Religiosity; Muslim.

Experiences of rejection have most often been studied in the form of perceived or experienced discrimination (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2006; Maliepaard & Verkuyten, 2018). What experiences of discrimination are associated with is not always clear. In the current study we aim to understand more precisely the benefits of religiosity but also what aspect of religiosity may be more, or less, associated with experiences of discrimination by the dominant group. For that, we investigate a Muslim minority group in a secular Western context: Afghan refugees in the Netherlands. Since 9/11, Muslim minorities are severely stigmatised, and European majority public has adopted highly negative positions on Islam (van Meeteren & van Oostendorp, 2019; Verkuyten & Zaremba, 2005). The European Union Agency for

Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2017) finds that 31% of Muslim respondents said they had been discriminated against. Against the background of increasingly hostile public attitudes toward Islam in general and Muslim immigrants and refugees in particular (see Bell et al., 2021), we are especially interested in how particular aspects of being a Muslim—for example, believing in Allah, actively practicing one's religion—are associated with perceiving discrimination, identifying with both ethnic and national groups and well-being. We draw on the observation that religiosity is associated with positive effects when it is valued in a societal context, but this changes when a religion is not valued (religiosity-as-social-value hypothesis, Gebauer et al., 2012). Moreover, we argue that it is useful to assess the applicability of the Rejection

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Disidentification Model (RDIM) in other, mostly overlooked samples, such as Muslim refugee samples, which are often treated differently and experience more adversity than immigrants (see Deslandes & Anderson, 2019, for a meta-analysis).

### BEING RELIGIOUS: A BENEFIT OR RISK FOR WELL-BEING?

Religiosity is positively related to well-being (e.g., Leondari & Gialamas, 2009) and mental health (Smith et al., 2003). The social support and coping mechanisms that religiosity provides seem to be the main drivers of its positive effects (Lim & Putnam, 2010; Seybold & Hill, 2001). However, the positive effects of religiosity on well-being seem to be dependent on whether society values these religious aspects (Gebauer et al., 2012; Stavrova et al., 2013). For example, a higher centrality of religion in one's life was indirectly related to higher depression and lower self-esteem for stigmatised Muslim and other-religious minority groups in Belgium as religiosity increased the perception of intolerance and public hostility from the majority members (see Friedman & Saroglou, 2010).

It appears that negative majority attitudes are more likely when a minority features a clearly different religious affiliation (Deslandes & Anderson, 2019; van Osch & Breugelmans, 2012). Ethnic minority groups, particularly Muslim groups, are subject to widespread discrimination and prejudice (e.g., Vermeulen & Peninx, 2000). In many European countries, immigrants of Arab and Turkish origin face significant prejudice (Saroglou et al., 2009). In Europe, there are predominantly negative public attitudes toward religion in general (Voas & Crockett, 2005) and even hostile against Islam and Muslims in particular (Allen & Nielsen, 2002). Thus, as a minority group member, being a Muslim can be both a resource and a burden in this increasingly discriminatory intergroup context.

Religiosity, however, can be differentiated into several facets with different implications for minority group members (Saroglou, 2011). *Religious practices* (attending the mosque, traditional clothing) are typically highly visible and may have a strong impact on acceptance by majority group members. In contrast, *religious beliefs* (believing in god, afterlife), *religious coping* (turning toward one's faith in times of struggles) and *ethical principles* (behaviours that are endorsed and discouraged such as helping others or refraining from drinking alcohol) may represent more individualised forms of religiosity which are accepted by majority group members in Western immigration contexts, as long as

they are kept private. Religious practices, beliefs, coping and values are relevant components of daily life (Duderija, 2008; Thomas & Sanderson, 2011) and seem to have a positive effect on the perception that being Muslim is a valuable (i.e., meaningful) aspect of one's life (Abu Raiya et al., 2008). Religious practices among Muslim immigrant groups in Europe (and elsewhere) are of particular importance for the acculturative process, as these are experienced as culturally distant from the host society (Saroglou et al., 2009), are important for ethnic identification (Güngör et al., 2011) and are negatively related to identifying with the national host identity (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2018). On the one hand, practices such as mosque visits or daily prayers do not only provide some sense of continuity in a life fragmented by migration, they also signal higher commitment to world-views, sacred rituals and habits shared with co-ethnic Muslims, which, in turn, strengthens co-ethnic ties and belonging over time (Güngör et al., 2011; Maliepaard & Schacht, 2018). On the other hand, religious symbols (e.g., wearing a hijab) and practices of Muslims (e.g., Ramadan, feast of sacrifice) underline their otherness to the majority members and elicit scrutiny and discriminatory responses in intergroup interactions (Helbling, 2014). It was found that when Muslim minority members signalled conservative attitudes or practices, majority members tended to show higher discrimination against them (Choi et al., 2021). Perceived discrimination is high among Muslim immigrant and minority members living in Europe (Brüß, 2008). In contexts where immigrants' religiosity is seen as a bright boundary marker, more religious immigrants seem to find it difficult to identify with the national group, especially among first-generation Muslims (Spiegler et al., 2016; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007). Therefore, aspects of religion, especially the visible ones, can put Muslims at risk of being discriminated against, triggering defensive processes to cope with adversity.

### REJECTION (DIS-)IDENTIFICATION MODELS

There are several models describing how perceiving threats from one's environment affects one's identification with a range of groups one belongs to and how identity can potentially buffer the impact of threat on one's well-being. Most importantly, the Rejection Identification Model (RIM) holds that if minority group members perceive threat from the majority group, they more strongly identify with their minority group, which buffers the negative impact that perceptions of threat have on well-being (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). A process that seems to happen at the same time is that threat from the majority group also seems to lead to lower identification with the majority group, which in

turn affects well-being, this is referred to as the Rejection Disidentification model (RDIM; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2009; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012). For example, in minority youths across Western European countries it was found that perceived discrimination in school was negatively related to identifying with the national group (Fleischmann & Phaet, 2018). For the Afghan minority group in the Netherlands, discrimination experiences were found to be associated with both an increased ethnic identification (RIM) as well as a decreased national identification, and their subsequent positive effects on well-being (RDIM; Bobowik et al., 2017).

Although these models explain how discrimination experiences may lead to well-being through stronger ethnic and weaker national identity among disadvantaged and stigmatised minority groups, there is evidence suggesting a more complex relation between religiosity, ethnic identity and perceived discrimination. With regard to the relation between ethnic identity and discrimination, Meca et al. (2020) found among Latino/a youth that the relation is bidirectional (Meca et al., 2020). While some Muslims may downplay their religious activities when faced with discrimination, others may assert their religiosity (Irving Jackson & Doerschler, 2018). Specifically with regard to perceptions of the dominant group, Stuart et al. (2020) show in a sample of Muslims in the UK that perceived Islamophobia was associated with a more pronounced Muslim identity, and perceived discrimination with a weaker national identity. Researchers also acknowledge the possibility that more religious Muslims may be more vulnerable to perceived discrimination (Maliepaard et al., 2015). For example, Verkuyten and Yildiz (2007) found that a model predicting lower Dutch identification from Muslim religious identification via perceived discrimination performed equally well statistically as their original RDIM model in which perceived discrimination was an antecedent. Similarly, research on Muslim minorities in the U.S. and New Zealand found that visible religious practices, for example, wearing headscarf and religious attendance, were related to higher perceived discrimination (Dana et al., 2019; Jasperse et al., 2012). We conceptualise religiosity as relevant for experiences of discrimination and identification, and propose that in a context where Muslim immigrants' religion is a source of stigma (Friedman & Saroglou, 2010) and a "bright" intergroup boundary (i.e., boundaries that are clear and visible, see Alba, 2005), Muslim immigrants more visibly practicing their religion may perceive more discrimination.

In our aim to connect the literature on the relationship between different aspects of religiosity, adversity and well-being with models focusing on adversity and identification, we tested the following hypotheses among a sample of Afghan refugees in the Netherlands:

- H1: Religious practices, not beliefs, coping and values, are associated with increased perceived discrimination.  
 H2: Perceived discrimination is associated with enhanced identification with the ethnic group.  
 H3: Perceived discrimination is associated with reduced identification with the majority group.  
 H4: Identification with the ethnic group and identification with the majority group are both positively related to well-being.  
 H5: Perceived discrimination mediates the relationship between religious practices and identifications with both the ethnic and majority group.  
 H6: Perceived discrimination mediates the relationship between religious practices and well-being.

## METHOD

### Participants

A total of 201 participants completed the survey. Eighteen participants were excluded because they were non-Muslim ( $n = 8$  were atheist,  $n = 5$  indicated "other,"  $n = 2$  failed to indicate religious affiliation), under the age of 18 years ( $n = 2$ ) or did not live in the Netherlands ( $n = 1$ ). Of our final sample  $N = 183$  (35% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 31.27$ ,  $SD = 12.68$ ), 93.4% was born in Afghanistan, and the average length of stay in NL of those who migrated was 15.23 years ( $SD = 4.63$ ; range 1–33). Exactly 59.6% reported to have a degree at a higher vocational education or university level, and 62.8% reported to have a paid job.

People with an Afghan cultural background in the Netherlands constitute a small minority group (ca. 51,000; <0.3% of the Dutch population in 2018; Statline, 2019) as compared with other minority groups in the Netherlands (e.g., Turkish-Dutch = 2.4%, Moroccan-Dutch = 2.3%; Statline, 2019). Until the arrival of Syrian refugees (after 2016), Afghan refugees have been the largest group with a refugee status. Most Afghans came to the Netherlands in the late 1990s, as a result of a civil war in Afghanistan and the rise of the Taliban (Siegel et al., 2009). This applied to all our participants. There is little attention to this specific group, although it is occasionally mentioned in overview reports (e.g., Pels & de Gruijter, 2005). Afghan refugees are a (relatively) highly educated group, similar to the level of Dutch without a migration background (Dourleijn & Dagevos, 2011).

### Procedure

Participants were either approached during seminars of Afghan institutions (Stichting Farda, Stichting Keihan, Aria Students and Favon) or during Friday prayer in

Afghan mosques (in the cities of Den Bosch, Eindhoven, Utrecht and Amsterdam) by the fifth author or recruited using snowball sampling (via chairpersons of the Institutions/Mosques). Participants took part in the study when they were from the group of Afghan refugees. All participants provided informed consent and were debriefed about the study, and given the opportunity to receive an e-mail about the major findings of the study. Participants filled out pen and paper versions of the survey.

## Measures

### Demographics

Participants indicated age, gender, country of birth, country of birth of both parents, religion, marital status, employment status, duration of time spent in the Netherlands and their highest level of completed education.

### Religiosity

We used several subscales of the “Psychological Measure of Islamic Religiousness” (PMIR; Abu Raiya et al., 2008). We assessed *Islamic beliefs* with five items (“I believe in the existence of Allah”; 0 = no, 1 = I am not certain, 2 = yes; Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .89$ ), *Islamic Positive Religious Coping* with seven items (“When I face a problem in life, I consider that a test from Allah to deepen my belief”; 1 = never, 4 = often;  $\alpha = .92$ ), *Islamic Ethical Principles* with five items (“Islam is the major reason why I do not eat pork”; 1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree;  $\alpha = .93$ ) and *Islamic practices* with five items (“How often do you pray/fast/attend the mosque”; 1 = never, 5 = five times a day or more [labels varied across questions due to the content of the question];  $\alpha = .88$ ). A confirmatory factor analysis using the robust maximum likelihood estimator was

carried out to test the four-factor structure of the scale, and the model fit well,  $\chi^2 (203, N = 183) = 346.37$ ,  $p < .05$ , CFI = .94, RMSEA = .06, TLI = .93). All items load positively on the respective factors and the four dimensions are correlated with each other ( $r$ 's ranging from .64 to .74). Note that a confirmatory factor analysis with all items loading on one single religiosity factor fit significantly worse than the four-factor model  $\chi^2 (209, N = 183) = 821.62$ ,  $p < .05$ , CFI = .73, RMSEA = .12, TLI = .70.

### Perceived discrimination

Perceived discrimination was assessed with 10 items adapted from the everyday discrimination scale by Williams, Yu, Jackson and Anderson (1997; e.g., “Dutch people treat me with little respect”). The original scale contains nine items, we added an item explicitly asking about being discriminated (1 = never, 4 = often;  $\alpha = .85$ ).

### Identity

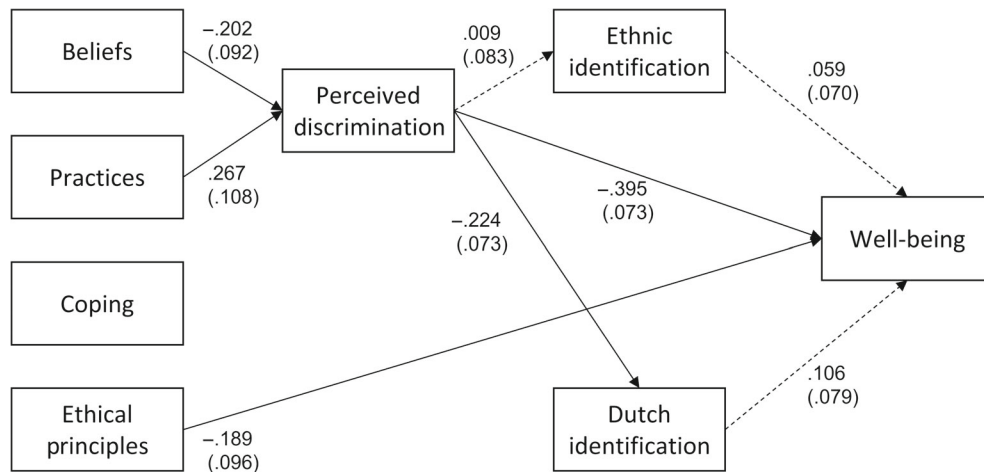
Dutch identity was assessed with a shortened version of the Dutch identity scale by Verkuyten (2005). Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with four statements (e.g., “My Dutch identity is very important to me”; 1 = completely disagree—5 = completely agree;  $\alpha = .77$ ). Afghan identity was assessed using the same scale, but then with their Afghan identity as the target ( $\alpha = .77$ ).

### Well-being

We assessed well-being with five items derived from Bradley and Lewis (1990). Participants indicated how they felt during the last 2 weeks (e.g., “I have felt cheerful and in good spirits”; 1 = not at all, 6 = all the time;

**TABLE 1**  
Descriptive statistics and correlations among key variables

	M (SD)	Beliefs	Practices	Coping	Ethical principles	Afghan identity	Dutch identity	Perceived discrimination
Beliefs	2.80 (.40)							
Practices	3.46 (1.37)	.577**						
Coping	3.05 (.80)	.677**	.682**					
Ethical principles	3.75 (1.23)	.604**	.630**	.668**				
Afghan identity	3.71 (.78)	.111	.166*	.094	.174*			
Dutch identity	3.05 (.77)	-.026	.019	-.014	-.080	-.080		
Perceived discrimination	1.72 (.47)	.015	.185*	.072	.045	.074	-.168*	
Well-being	3.94 (1.10)	.049	.063	.047	-.006	.005	.201**	-.360**



**Figure 1.** Results from the path model with perceived discrimination, ethnic and Dutch identification as mediators between dimensions of religiosity and well-being. Standardised regression coefficients (standard errors) are presented for hypothesized and/or observed paths (solid arrows) and hypothesized but not observed paths (dashed arrows).

$\alpha = .87$ ).<sup>1</sup> All scale scores were constructed using the mean item scores.

## RESULTS

The Pearson correlations among the main variables are presented in Table 1. The four religious dimensions were positively correlated with each other. Religious practices and ethical principles were positively related to Afghan identity, while no religiosity dimension was associated with Dutch Identity. Perceived discrimination was positively related to religious practice and negatively related to Dutch identity. Finally, well-being was positively related to Dutch identity and negatively related to perceived discrimination. We did not find any effects of age and gender of the participants.

A path model with antecedents and mediators for well-being was tested in Mplus 7.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2020). In this model ( $n = 170^2$ ), the four dimensions of religiosity (i.e., beliefs, practices, coping and ethical principles) statistically predicted perceived discrimination (the first mediator), these five variables predicted both Dutch identity and Afghan identity (the second set of mediators), and finally all seven variables plus length of stay in the Netherlands statistically predicted well-being. Length of stay in the Netherlands was added as a control, as time spent in the host country has been found to impact acculturation outcomes (Cobb et al., 2017).

The robust maximum likelihood estimator was used and both direct and indirect effects were tested. The model fit the data well,  $\chi^2(3, 170) = 7.02$ ,  $p = .07$ , CFI = .917, RMSEA = .089, SRMR = .032 and explained in total 23.8% of the variance of well-being.

Religious beliefs were negatively related to perceived discrimination ( $\beta = -.202$ ,  $p = .028$ ) and practices were positively related to perceived discrimination ( $\beta = .267$ ,  $p = .013$ ; see Figure 1). Perceived discrimination had a significant direct effect on Dutch identity ( $\beta = -.224$ ,  $p = .002$ ). Ethical principles ( $\beta = -.189$ ,  $p = .049$ ) and perceived discrimination ( $\beta = -.395$ ,  $p < .001$ ) had significant direct effects on well-being. Length of stay in the Netherlands ( $\beta = .176$ ,  $p = .005$ ) was also related to well-being (not displayed in Figure 1). All other direct paths were nonsignificant (all  $ps > .063$ ).

Among all indirect paths we observed three significant mediations. First, perceived discrimination mediated the relationship between religious practice and Dutch identity (indirect effect  $\beta = -.060$ ,  $p = .041$ ). Perceived discrimination also mediated the effect of religious practices on well-being (indirect effect  $\beta = -.106$ ,  $p = .024$ ). Finally, the relationship between religious beliefs and well-being was also mediated by perceived discrimination (indirect effect  $\beta = .080$ ,  $p = .040$ ). It is important to acknowledge that the data we report is cross-sectional and can therefore be compatible with more alternative models than we report here, and model fit is not to be taken as an indicator

<sup>1</sup>The data collection also included other measures not at the central interest of the paper, such as perceived cultural distance, support for multiculturalism, acculturation attitudes, and satisfaction with life. We focused on affective well-being as an indicator of general adjustment as it may be more reflective of the resilience of immigrant-origin individuals compared with global (cognitive) life satisfaction (Güngör & Perdu, 2017; see also Tip et al., 2020).

<sup>2</sup> This number is lower than the sample size due to missing values.

of causal direction (for the extended argument, see Fiedler et al., 2018).<sup>3</sup>

We also tested the same model with age, gender, education and worker (vs. student) status as covariates to directly predict wellbeing. This model fits slightly worse:  $\chi^2(15, 169) = 31.095$ ,  $p = .009$ , CFI = .751, RMSEA = .080, SRMR = .040, and explained in total 27.3% of the variance of well-being. In this model, well-being was not statistically predicted by age ( $\beta = .036$ ,  $p = .670$ ), gender ( $\beta = -.046$ ,  $p = .512$ ) or education ( $\beta = .063$ ,  $p = .498$ ), while it was predicted by work status ( $\beta = -.174$ ,  $p = .018$ ), indicating that students generally reported higher levels of wellbeing than workers. Other predictions were unaffected.

## DISCUSSION

In this article we combined insights on the relationship between threat, identity and well-being and on the relationship between religion, adversity and well-being to understand the role of various aspects of religiosity as relevant for perceived discrimination and how this relates to identification with either the minority or majority groups as well as well-being.

We predicted that religious practices, as a more visible aspect of one's religiosity, would be associated with perceived discrimination, whereas we did not expect such relations for other less visible aspects of one's religiosity such as religious beliefs, coping and ethical principles. We observed a significant positive relationship between religious practices and perceived discrimination, confirming H1. This effect aligns with other recent studies among Muslim minorities in other parts of the world who experienced more perceived discrimination when they actively practiced their religion (e.g., Dana et al., 2019; Jasperse et al., 2012).

Perceived discrimination was not related to identification with the ethnic group, which fails to support H2. We did observe a significant relationship between perceived discrimination and identification with the majority group, supporting H3. However, neither identification with the ethnic group nor the majority group was associated with well-being, failing to support H4. We also did not observe an indirect effect of perceived discrimination on well-being via identification. Therefore, our data do not completely fit the RIM or RDIM models. One could argue that this may be caused by the specific group under examination, however both RIM and RDIM pathways have been found among Afghan refugees in the Netherlands before (Bobowik et al., 2017). There are of

course differences between that study and ours in terms of samples (panel vs. community sample), measures, time of study, but none of these variables would—in our view—provide a compelling argument for why the findings deviate from one another. However, past findings for the RIM have been mixed; perceived discrimination was found to be not or sometimes negatively related to ethnic identification (Armenta & Hunt, 2009; Badea et al., 2011; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2009; Wiley et al., 2013).

We observed support for the idea that religious practices may be related to people's (dis)identification with the majority group when experiencing adversity: Perceived discrimination mediated the relationship between religious practices and identification, confirming H5. However, this relation only occurred for identification with the majority group, not for identification with the ethnic group. The lack of a direct or indirect effect in the path model, even though not hypothesized, is surprising as religiosity is considered a big part of one's ethnic identification among Muslim immigrants in Europe (see Güngör et al., 2013, for a review). Group characteristics and acculturation contexts may have played a role here. Previous studies have shown that more religious minorities are more strongly identified with their ethnic groups if they are embedded in a cohesive and established co-ethnic community with high levels of social monitoring and control (Maliepaard et al., 2015). First generation Afghan refugees may have less opportunities for minority contacts to support religiosity and ethnic identity in face of discriminatory treatment and environment. The acculturation context may also play a role, where such relationships exist in more threatening contexts, and are absent in less threatening ones; relationships between perceived discrimination based on being a Muslim was related to religious and national identification in (more adverse) Germany, but not in (less adverse) Norway (Kunst et al., 2012).

Finally, perceived discrimination also mediated the relationship between religious practices and well-being, confirming H6. Thus, practicing one's religion is positively associated with perceived discrimination, which in turn is negatively related to one's well-being. This finding corroborates the idea that apart from having just positive effects on well-being, religiosity may also impact well-being in a negative way when such religious aspects are not considered valuable (Gebauer et al., 2012; Stavrova et al., 2013). Interestingly, although not significant, we observed a trend such that religious practices were directly positively related to well-being ( $\beta = .180$ ,  $p = .086$ ). This is an indication that practicing one's religion might indeed have positive or at least buffering

<sup>3</sup> We also computed the model with all direction reversed (except length of stay as a covariate) and compared the model fit against the model reported above. Since this reversed model is saturated, we could not compare fit  $\chi^2$  and fit indices, but we compared AIC and BIC of the two models. The model reported above (Akaike [AIC] = 1711.369; Bayesian [BIC] = 1839.937) fits better than the reversed model (Akaike [AIC] = 2581.819; Bayesian [BIC] = 2770.3190).

effects on well-being due to creating structure, social support, and a sense of belonging (Jasperse et al., 2012), however these positive effects of practicing may be overshadowed by the negative effect it has on how minorities are perceived by the majority.

We did not have particular expectations for effects of the other aspects of religiosity. All aspects are highly related (all  $r_s > .577$ ), but form separate factors in a CFA. Also, we observed that religious beliefs were negatively related to perceived discrimination, such that the more one believes the less discrimination is perceived. Moreover, perceived discrimination mediated a relationship between religious beliefs and well-being. Thus, believing reduced perceptions of discrimination and thus lowered its negative impact on well-being. These findings are in line with the notion that religious beliefs, as distinct from other aspects of religiosity, inform broader belief systems, such as the fairness of the world, beliefs in good outcomes for enduring difficulty or understanding adversities as spiritual opportunities (Park, 2005; Saroglou, 2011). With their implication for other meaning-making processes, religious beliefs may alter the perception of adverse situations.<sup>4</sup>

Fleeing one's country is often associated with an immense amount of (post-traumatic) stress and sense of loss. Rebuilding a meaningful existence in a new environment may be much easier if one is able to settle in in a religious community that can provide structure and support. However, doing so may create adverse effects if one's religion is not particularly valued in the country of settlement. Holding on to one's religion and creating ties with a new majority group may thus be a balancing act. It has been shown before that the more culturally distant a minority group is, also in terms of religion, the lower the support of the majority for minorities to be able to express their "different" cultural values and practices (van Osch & Breugelmans, 2012). Even though many people in Western Europe are positive about freedom of religion, they struggle with everyday expressions of such practices (e.g., wearing a hijab; Helbling, 2014). One could argue that Muslims in the West are better off practicing Islam outside of sight of the majority, to ascertain that these practices do not result in more discrimination and lower well-being. However, doing so might in turn create a multitude of other negative effects, such as segregation. Combining religious Muslim practices with the adoption of national culture however, might be a fruitful direction. It could be that Muslims who exhibit a strong national identity or more assimilated values are discriminated against less (van Oudenhoven et al., 1998).

Specifying which aspect of being a minority causes one to be discriminated against may be both a benefit as well as being a drawback. A benefit might be that specifying one aspect as causing the discrimination may create better insights into which aspects of being a minority matter in terms of acceptance by the majority, in terms of creating practical solutions as to how to improve minority well-being, as well as smoothening the integration process into multicultural societies. In the current case we specified that for Afghan refugees in a Western context it may be their religion that is visible to the majority. However, it may well be that it is not religiousness or practicing religion per se that matters for discrimination. It may be that being visibly different from the majority triggers experiences of discrimination and identification processes affecting well-being (van Osch & Breugelmans, 2012). For example, the self-reported frequency of speaking Polish in public places may be associated with experiences of discrimination among Polish labour migrants in Western Europe.

Many Afghans have been in the Netherlands since the 1990s. Their acculturation experiences may offer a perspective for how to understand more recent groups (including recent Afghan groups) that they share similarities with. The large group of Syrian refugees shares some relevant characteristics with the relatively highly educated Afghan group (Hessels, 2004). Syrians, for instance, are predominantly Muslim, hold relatively high education levels, and few differences in educational attainment between genders (for more details, see Dagevos et al., 2018). Dagevos et al. conclude that the educational level of Syrian refugees is most comparable to individuals with an Afghan (or Iraqi) migration background in the Netherlands. Particularly young Afghan refugees are doing well in terms of their educational attainment, almost at the level of native Dutch (Central Office for Statistics, 2017), and educational levels of Afghans in general are similar to Dutch natives, only surpassed by Iranians in the Netherlands (De Mooij et al., 2020).

However, groups that are very well educated, adjusted and are doing comparatively well socioeconomically, like Afghans in the Netherlands, may also experience the so-called integration paradox: highly educated immigrants turn away from the dominant society, instead of adapting to it more. Often, these groups tend to experience more discrimination as they are (due to their educational and professional life) more in contact with the dominant group (for an overview, see Verkuyten, 2016). It appears unlikely that the integration paradox applies to the sample reported in this study, as levels of perceived discrimination were low (as for many Afghans, see

<sup>4</sup> In line with previous literature, we observed a direct effect of length of stay on well-being, such that when an immigrant has more exposure and experience in their new country of residence they tend to do better (also see Cobb et al., 2017). In addition, we observed a direct relationship between religious ethical principles and well-being, such that the stronger people hold on their ethical principles the lower their well-being. Because we did not hypothesize this effect and because its effect was close to the cut-off point of common standards of significance we report but not interpret it.

Hessels & Wassie, 2003a), and Dutch identity relatively high.

## Limitations

First, our study was based on self-reports of discrimination, which does not allow for a conclusive interpretation of sensitivity to discrimination or frequency of discrimination. Second, while sizeable for a hard-to-reach sample, statistically speaking our sample was relatively small. This notwithstanding, our community sample of Muslim refugees may be more representative than an online sample of students or panel members who potentially represent a subsample of more educated, affluent and generally adjusted refugees. Our sample is also similar to what the Netherlands Institute for Social Research reports, such that most Afghans have a refugee background and are a (relatively) highly educated group (Dourleijn & Dagevos, 2011). The low levels of perceived discrimination in our sample are in line with other data showing that, compared with other minority groups, Afghans feel less discriminated by Dutch natives (Hessels & Wassie, 2003a, 2003b). Third, we did not assess religious identity, which limits our assessment of the role of identity; we only focused on four facets of religiosity, specifically visible practices. Finally, our cross-sectional design does not allow for a directional or causal interpretation of the relationships (finding that a reversed model exhibits a worse fit is not sufficient, see Fiedler et al., 2018); a longitudinal design would be a necessary next step. This is specifically relevant with regard to our finding that visible religious practices may render Muslim refugees more prone to experience discrimination. There is, however, some evidence that individuals who strongly identify with a specific group may interpret negative outcomes in intergroup terms—and may accordingly be more likely to experience discrimination against their ingroup (e.g., Badea et al., 2020; Ellemers et al., 1997; McCoy & Major, 2003; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013). In short, it can be questioned whether discrimination is the starting point (as specified in the RDIM). People may differ in how perceived discrimination affects them on the basis of their group identification or well-being. For example, well-being across time predicts to what extent people perceive or actually experience discrimination (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2009). Identification may also alter perceptions of threat and thus buffer against adverse health effects (also see Eccleston & Major, 2006). At the same time, there is also evidence for perceived discrimination predicting identification over time and not the other way around (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2009; Tartakovsky, 2009).

It would be optimal to calculate the required sample size before data collection to ensure the alignment of sample size, analyses, and power concerns. Our sample

constitutes a hard-to reach sample, so we opted for a maximisation of the sample. In complex models like ours (i.e., with multiple mediators), it is difficult to get an accurate estimate following the currently available guidelines. Proxy measures were taken and they suggested that our sample size was on the lower bound for detecting the mediation (Cohen et al., 2003).

Taken together, we argue in the current study that religious practices are an important aspect of religiosity in explaining perceived discrimination, identification with the majority group, as well as well-being in a Muslim refugee sample in a Western context.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the Ethical Review Board at Tilburg University and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all individual adult participants included in the study.

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