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Living on the Margins: Poverty, Exclusion, and Segregation in Muğla*

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Abstract

This study marks the initial phase of a project aimed at exploring how urban poverty affects children's educational processes through an analysis of space-related issues. Cities, increasingly home to growing populations, serve as hubs where people globally encounter contemporary opportunities and challenges in accessing fundamental rights such as education, health, housing, and security. The distinguishing factor among residents sharing the same city is the pervasive phenomenon of inequality. Inequality not only shapes spatial experiences but also influences the conditions of poverty and deprivation in terms of consumption patterns. Thus, consumption behaviors permeate all aspects of life and serve as crucial criteria for social inclusion and exclusion, reflecting one's social existence. The exclusion of those unable to consume as much as others from social environments and living spaces is a widespread consequence of capitalist urbanization. This study focuses on the lived experiences of poverty and deprivation within the framework of urban poverty, social exclusion, and spatial segregation—common outcomes of inequality in modern cities. Conducted in neighbourhoods heavily populated by the urban poor in the Menteşe district of Muğla province, the study employs a case study model. It aims to illuminate participants' experiences related to space, issues concerning urban life practices, experiences with social assistance, and consumption behaviours.

Keywords: Poverty, urban poverty, social exclusion, spatial segregation

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Introduction

One of the primary issues promised to be solved by the modern world but instead exacerbated is the problem of inequality and poverty. While the definitions of poverty and deprivation have evolved throughout history, the stage for inequality has often remained the same: cities. This is because cities have historically thrived due to the geographical and social concentration of surplus production since their inception. In this context, urbanization, as noted by Harvey (2008), has consistently been a manifestation of class dynamics because while resources are extracted from a specific place and individual, control over their expenditure typically consolidates in the hands of a few. These interrelated relationships and inequalities perpetuated by the capitalist economic system particularly highlight various definitions of poverty in urban areas with dense populations.

In its simplest form, poverty can be defined as "the lack of access to basic human needs such as food, water, clothing, housing, healthcare services, and security necessary for dignified living, generally due to insufficient resources and income" (Oktik, 2008). However, factors such as the changing/expanding scope of human needs, neoliberalism and the dissolution of the welfare state, and a consumption-oriented lifestyle have also altered the societal perceptions and experiences of poverty. In this context, while poverty was traditionally addressed through economically based definitions from the 18th century to the first half of the 20th century, meanings attributed to poverty as a phenomenon have shifted since the 1960s to definitions that consider the experiences of others within society (Gül & Sallan Gül, 2008).

The juxtaposition of the concepts of urban and poverty has been perceived as a commonplace aspect of urban life since the days when capitalist economies were constructed, and accordingly, capitalist urbanization emerged. The concept of urban poverty emphasizes the particular and novel forms that poverty takes on in cities. It focuses on the departure of some urban residents from having access to an economic income that meets their basic needs and their increasing detachment from the consumption-oriented lifestyles of the rest of society. In the consumer society, where everything is seen as consumable commodities, as Baudrillard (2017) noted, the influence of the urban and industrial environment gives rise to new scarcities such as space and time, clean air, greenery, water, and silence. In this context, urban poverty also transforms the occupied position in the city into an object of consumption. Processes such as the differentiation of opportunities offered by cities for people living in the same city and the indexing of social existence to consumption, within the framework of neoliberal policies replacing welfare state policies, have intertwined with the increasing inequalities in income distribution between social classes. Therefore, terms such as urban poverty defined within the axis of consumer society have brought the concept of social exclusion to the forefront, along with concepts like new poverty. The emergence of problems such as poverty, inequality, and exploitation under the heading of social exclusion after the Industrial Revolution occurred in the 1970s, coinciding with the social crises caused by neoliberal policies worldwide (Tartanoğlu, 2011).

Studies on social exclusion have a long history, but they gained attention with the publication of "Les exclus: un Français sur dix/ Excluded: One in Ten French" by Lenoir, the Secretary of State for Social Action in France, in 1974. According to Lenoir, the excluded are citizens who are marginalized from mainstream society due to factors such as disability, mental illness, and poverty. He emphasized that the existence of these citizens contributes to the division of society and undermines the egalitarian citizenship and social integration model central to the welfare state tradition (Sapançalı, 2005). In its most general form, social exclusion is the process whereby certain individuals and groups are unable to access civil, political, economic, and social rights that enable integration with society and is often addressed in conjunction with the phenomenon of poverty (Özmete, 2011). However, the concept is more inclusive than emphasizing difficulties in accessing basic rights such as housing and food, which are dominant in poverty-related approaches. Social exclusion is considered as a phenomenon resulting from various processes, such as economic inadequacy, deterioration of social relationships, lack of social protection, exclusion from institutional relationships, and exclusion from social environments, influencing each other in various ways (Hatipler, 2019).

Social exclusion is a multifaceted concept discussed from various perspectives such as cultural, political, social, and economic (Cass et al., 2005; Krivo et al., 2013; Levitas et al., 2007). For instance, Kenyon et al. (2002), summarizing previous research, expanded the concept of social exclusion beyond the mentioned perspectives to nine main dimensions of exclusion: economic, social, social networks, organized political, personal political, personal, living space, temporal, and mobility. All these dimensions interact significantly with individual mobility, activity participation, and accessibility (Farber et al., 2011). Additionally, some studies have emphasized that social exclusion is reinforced by difficulty in accessing opportunities (Church et al., 2000). In other words, low accessibility is a potential indicator of social exclusion (Casas, 2007; Farrington & Farrington, 2005). Individuals or social groups disadvantaged in accessing social opportunities (such as women, the poor, the elderly, children, and people with disabilities) may face a higher risk of social exclusion. Compared to typical groups, these individuals often have lower mobility, experience more spatial-temporal constraints due to household chores, and encounter class, racial, or ethnic biases (Tan et al., 2017).

Another concept frequently associated with the phenomenon of social exclusion is spatial segregation (Somerville, 1998). Spatial segregation entails the concentration of a group in a specific physical space, leading to their isolation from the rest of society. This segregation can be associated with various factors such as ethnic identity, proximity to workplaces, lifestyle, and access to housing. Similar to the phenomenon of social exclusion, spatial segregation is multidimensional and multifaceted. In the consumer society where states of poverty and deprivation evolve, it is often emphasized that social exclusion and spatial segregation are successive stages of poverty. Poverty, which is diversifying, becoming more complex, and undergoing structural changes, can lead to a spiral of poverty-social exclusion and subsequently poverty. Social exclusion occurs when individuals are prevented from participating in social environments and activities. This isolation can occur due to lack of transportation or housing policies that spatially and temporally isolate vulnerable groups from activities (Wang et al., 2020).

Isolated housing policies, which trigger spatial segregation, can occur not only due to poverty but also due to differences in language, religion, and belief systems. The focal point of spatial segregation is the housing and the environment shaped around it. Urban segregation primarily occurs at the social level, with its physical manifestation being spatial segregation (Çetin, 2012). Spatial segregation is often a result of the reflection of inequalities and social exclusion in urban space. Both spatial and socioeconomic exclusion practices take on a visible form in space. Therefore, groups with different social, economic, and cultural characteristics cluster in spaces that differ in physical conditions (Marcuse, 2005). Neighbourhoods where housing types like shanties are concentrated are the sharpest examples of spatial segregation, where both urban poverty and social exclusion are commonly observed. Therefore, in the literature, spatial segregation is often associated with housing areas resembling shanty towns. In his work titled "Planet of Slums," Mark Davis (2016) focuses on the old, low-standard, shanty-type housing where urban poor worldwide face various forms of unhealthy and insecure housing conditions. While spatial segregation is commonly described as an initiative focusing on neighbourhoods where housing types like shanties are concentrated, it can be used based on the spatial concentration of all social classes. However, particularly with the rise of urban poverty, the widespread use of the concept refers to the concentration of the poor in urban sub-areas where housing is more affordable. Additionally, housing not only serves as a shelter for urban dwellers but also fulfils a universal need by supporting personal security and existential feelings (Madden & Marcuse, 2021).

The primary purpose of social life, which brings people together to live, is to facilitate the meeting of people's needs more easily and effectively. However, in today's urban life, this situation has become something only the affluent can access. The rest of the city's inhabitants have become a mass forced to live on the outskirts of cities, excluded from social environments necessary to provide this comfort to them. Alongside their living spaces, the schools where their children receive education have also become segregated. This situation effectively confines them to their own spaces, allowing them to socialize only with individuals from their own habitus. This study constitutes one phase of a TÜBİTAK 1001 project aimed at understanding how poverty is experienced in neighbourhoods where

it is prevalent in Muğla province and developing interventions to prevent poverty from being passed down from generation to generation through schools. The study aimed to understand poverty experiences within the scope of spatial manifestations and discussed the findings obtained from the fieldwork of the project.

Method

A qualitative approach was adopted in the research process, and the study was designed in the case study model. Case studies are narratives that describe specific and unique topics (individuals, organizations, neighbourhoods, events, etc.) and aim to reveal the story behind the outcomes by identifying the events that led to those outcomes (Neale et al., 2006). In this study, the perspectives of urban poor individuals living in Muğla and their experiences related to urban poverty were identified as the situation to be investigated. To gather information about the situation, interview and observation techniques were used.

Study Setting

Muğla, with a population of 123,227, is one of the small cities in the Aegean Region (MEB, 2024). The central district of the city, Menteşe, is located at the foothills of Mount Masa. Geographically, the northern and eastern boundaries of the Muğla region are marked by elevations significantly higher than the Turkish average (Uykucu, 1983). Due to its mountainous terrain, unlike the coastal districts, the settlement in Menteşe has historically been limited. Consequently, despite being the central district, it is smaller and economically less active compared to some other districts and neighboring cities. Due to its mountainous terrain, Muğla was one of the last regions to be affected by the changes brought by the construction of railways and highways in Anatolia in the second half of the 19th century (Tekeli, 2006). Therefore, the transportation challenges faced by the city led to a self-sustaining agricultural and manufacturing economy policy until the 1980s, particularly due to the impossibility of integrating with national markets (Oktik & Öztürk, 2007). After this period, developments in transportation and communication, along with tourism, various emerging production activities, the service sector, and the opening of a university in 1992, began to transform the city.

The primary reason for conducting the study around Old Muğla, located at the foothills of Mount Masa, is that it is the region with the lowest average rent and real estate prices in the city. Thus, it is a preferred area for the socio-economically disadvantaged population. This region also supports a lifestyle characterized by detached houses, small gardens, and the continuation of the functions of traditional neighbourhoods. Consequently, migrants from nearby mountain villages of Muğla and various cities in Turkey choose to settle in Old Muğla, located in the eastern part of the city, to benefit from low rent costs and maintain a traditional lifestyle. Today, this area, which constitutes the study's field and is still referred to as Eski Muğla, comprises the Hacırüstem, Balıbey, Camikebir, and Karşıyaka neighbourhoods. Additionally, these neighbourhoods, which contain the city's historically preserved residential fabric, have 400 structures aged between 100 to 300 years under protection (Muğla Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2024).

Justifying the research environment and group is a critical step for any study. Initially, the research process began with the selection of Balıbey and Hacırüstem neighbourhoods, where social aid recipients are concentrated. Following observations in the field, Karşıyaka and Camikebir neighbourhoods were also included in the research scope, expanding the study environment. This expansion considered both the persistence of poverty in these neighbourhoods with similar characteristics and the artificial boundaries separating these areas.

Study Group

Within the scope of the study, the neighbourhoods in Menteşe District with the highest number of social aid applications were selected for field research. With support from the neighbourhood headmen (muhtars), access was gained to impoverished families with children in the education process. During the formation of the study group, families identified during the preliminary exploratory phase and those referred by the muhtars, who are also responsible for organizing social aid in these

neighbourhoods, were selected based on the principle of maximum diversity. To reflect the diversity of all families living in these neighbourhoods, factors such as migration status, single-parent status, employment status (government employee, worker, seasonal worker, etc.) were considered. Accordingly, the study group consists of a total of 27 individuals. Table 1 below provides some information about the individuals interviewed in the study.

Table 1.

Demographic Information of Participants

Code	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Education	Employment Status	Place of Origin
1	47	Female	Single	Associate Degree	Unemployed	Muğla
2	37	Female	Single	High School	Unemployed	Gaziantep
3	51	Female	Single	Primary School	Unemployed	Muğla
4	47	Female	Married	Primary School	Unemployed	Muğla
5	32	Female	Married	Primary School	Unemployed	Ağrı
6	38	Male	Married	Primary School	Caregiver	Muğla
7	52	Female	Married	Primary School	Unemployed	Muğla
8	58	Male	Married	Secondary School dropout	Fisherman	Muğla
9	32	Female	Married	High School	Unemployed	Ağrı
10	32	Male	Married	Associate Degree	Worker	Muğla
11	30	Female	Married	Primary School dropout	Unemployed	Muğla
12	35	Male	Married	University dropout	Construction	Muğla
13	33	Female	Married	High School	Housewife	Aydın
14	34	Female	Married	High School	Housewife	Gaziantep
15	47	Female	Married	Illiterate	Housewife	Ağrı
16	42	Male	Divorced/Single	Secondary School	Municipal Worker + Weekend Construction Worker	Muğla
17	45	Female	Married	Primary School	Housewife	Muğla
18	37	Male	Married	Primary School	Unemployed	Ağrı
19	43	Male	Married	Associate Degree	Tradesman	Muğla
20	41	Female	Married	Primary School	Housewife/Unemployed	Muğla
21	28	Female	Married	Primary School	Housewife/Unemployed	Muğla
22	34	Female	Married	High School	Housewife	Muğla
23	38	Female	Married	Primary School	Housewife	Muğla
24	40	Female	Married	Primary School	Housewife/Unemployed	Muğla
25	34	Female	Married	Secondary School dropout	Housewife/Unemployed	Ağrı
26	43	Female	Married	High School	Service Sector	Muğla
27	42	Female	Married	High School	Service Sector	Muğla

Data Collection Tool

A semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers was used as the data collection tool. While creating these forms, experts from different disciplines conducted preliminary interviews in the field to explore the relationship between education and urban poverty specific to Muğla. After these preliminary interviews were evaluated by the researchers, interview questions were prepared using relevant literature. The prepared questions were reviewed by experts in sociology and educational sciences, and feedback was used to revise the questions. Pilot interviews were then conducted with two individuals living in the research area to test the clarity of the questions. Any sentences deemed unclear during these interviews were revised, and the questions were finalized. The pilot interviews were not included in the analysis.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected through face-to-face interviews with families in their homes within the study group. During the interviews, two or sometimes three interviewers were present. Each interviewer took observation/field notes, and these notes, along with the interview recordings, were included in the analysis. The interviews, conducted with the participants' consent, were recorded and later transcribed for the analysis. On average, the interviews lasted 40 minutes. Only one interview was not recorded due to the participant's reluctance; detailed notes were taken throughout this interview, and these notes were included in the analysis. The selected neighbourhoods feature single-story or two-story Greek and Turkish houses with historical protection status unique to the Muğla province. The most significant characteristic of this housing structure is the gardens enclosed by high walls between closely situated houses. These gardens facilitated the research process, especially under pandemic conditions, as the interviews were primarily conducted outdoors in these gardens.

One of the main challenges encountered during data collection was the presence of children during the household interviews. To address this, a member of the research team engaged with the children away from the interview setting to provide them with quality time, with the families' consent. Additionally, the close proximity of houses in these neighbourhoods led to curiosity about the research team, who were seen as outsiders, and posed challenges in maintaining the privacy of the interviews. Lastly, some participants were hesitant to be recorded due to fears of fraud or job loss from political criticisms. In this regard, the neighbourhood headmen played a crucial role in connecting the research team with potential participants and building trust.

Data Analysis

The research data were analysed using a descriptive approach. The analysis process was structured around four themes derived from the research questions, shaping the experience of place-specific poverty: place experience, issues related to urban living practices, experiences of receiving social aid, and consumption practices. Initially, transcripts of the interviews and field notes were prepared, and participants' views were grouped under the relevant headings. Differing views within each heading were further grouped, utilizing the field notes. During this stage of the analysis, input from experts in the fields of sociology and education was sought. These experts examined the alignment of participant views with the themes and the consistency of subcategories under each theme. Based on feedback from meetings with these experts, the themes and subcategories were finalized and presented to the reader.

In this study, which aimed to address the experiences of urban poverty in Muğla, it was considered important to both describe the designated area and to position the researchers themselves, in the interest of reflexivity. The reflexive approach in this research involved researchers attending interviews in pairs or groups of three, sharing and evaluating field notes the same day, and disseminating these notes among the entire research group. Expert opinions were also incorporated during the analysis process. These practices aimed to enhance the validity and reliability of the field experience, data, and analysis process.

Findings

Based on the conversations, observations, and all discourse and behaviours recorded, clues suggesting that the daily life patterns in the neighbourhoods are intertwined yet distinct from those in the rest of the city have emerged. During the interviews, it was observed that residents in these neighbourhoods include both locals from the mountain villages of Muğla and migrants from various other cities and regions. A common aspect of life in these neighbourhoods is the experience of migration. Another commonality is the localized nature of economic transactions that facilitate survival, widely accepted among the locals. In the city where they have migrated primarily for access to public services such as education for their children, health, and safety, these neighbourhoods exhibit daily practices that blend traditional community relations with those typical of urban settings.

Throughout various stages of the study, observations conducted in the field have facilitated the emergence of specific themes essential for sociological analysis. In this context, the central theme identified pertains to the definition of urban space within the scope of the study. The themes identified for spatial analysis include place experience, issues related to urban life practices, experiences with social assistance, and consumption practices. Given the descriptive nature of the analysis process, it has been extensively supported by observations.

Place Experience

The concept of urban poverty, like any sociological concept, is far from being a generalizable concept in terms of its usage. This means that if urban poverty is discussed, it is necessary to describe the urban space to be examined. Therefore, subjecting the space to multiple analyses, encompassing both the dynamics of the space and individuals' daily life experiences, i.e., the micro dimension in sociological terms, as well as the macro dimension shaping the city in terms of economic and political aspects worldwide, is highly important.

Muğla stands out as a city where transportation is difficult due to its mountainous terrain, unlike other coastal and plain cities in the Aegean region. While other cities experienced changes in their spatial structure by receiving migration during the modernization experience in Anatolia, Muğla remained a center away from the eyes until the 1980s, when neoliberal policies and tourism began to develop. The coastal settlements of Muğla, located on the coast, followed a different urbanization trajectory by engaging in trade through maritime routes throughout history, while Muğla functioned mainly as an administrative center among its districts, remaining smaller than its tourist-oriented districts even with its central district. The influence of neoliberal policies after 1980 came mostly from the tourist-oriented districts of Muğla. The main reason for the city's closed structure to migration is the high rents and housing shortages experienced in the center. However, with the increasing migration of students and employees due to the influence of bureaucrats and the university established in the city, the need for the service sector has also increased over time. This situation constitutes the main motivation for the beginning of migration to the city center of Muğla.

In summary, Muğla has urbanized at different times compared to other Anatolian cities, continuously receiving intensive migration since the 1950s from Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, and from the 1970s onwards undergoing transformations due to neoliberal economic and industrialization efforts. In this regard, Muğla presents a distinctly different urban landscape as it left its period of major migration to the 1990s and beyond. Various stages of the research have shown that the phenomenon of migration, which is widespread in many cities in Turkey today, is relatively minimal in the city center of Muğla when compared to its districts. The majority of migrations to the city are primarily from mountain villages near the city center due to the importance placed on education. Observing the phenomenon of migration to the city center due to education has provided an opportunity to evaluate the importance and validity of education and work. As a relatively recent phenomenon, in recent years, migrants have also arrived in the city from other cities in the country to work in the service sector. In the neighbourhoods where the research was conducted, the new residents of the city's protected historical structure include migrants who want to pay relatively cheaper rents compared to the rest of the city (The rents of houses in the central areas of the city are approximately 4-5 times higher than the

rents in the researched area.), and who also wish to maintain their traditional lifestyle. In addition, the area is populated by long-time residents who have inherited these houses and continue to live there. Almost all migrants settling in this area express a preference to live in more centrally located neighbourhoods, citing the relatively inexpensive rents in their current area as a reason. However, the style of housing, predominantly single or two-story detached houses with gardens surrounded by high walls, also offers a distinct lifestyle. Moreover, it provides the most affordable rents in the city...

G26: "I'm so glad I live in this area. I really love it here, you know. I just told my friend earlier. I could never do it in an apartment building. This might be the best place in my life."

G8: "Rent. Also, financially... Muğla is a very expensive city. When you think about living in Muğla, you need to think about it 40 times. Living in Muğla is nice, you have a house, you have things. Living in Muğla is really good in terms of transportation, but unfortunately, low-income earners like us are struggling. It's a very expensive city, I grew up here."

G13: "Living here is nice. Here, for example, there's more neighborliness compared to apartment buildings. Because we have this inner connection with each other. Detached houses have a big impact on this. Our neighbourhood is good, no problems, but as I said, the roads are a problem. Actually, one of Muğla's biggest problems is the roads. Cars pass each other side by side when parked, garbage trucks and such. Otherwise, there's no problem, just a parking problem. If a fire broke out here, the houses would burn to ashes until the cars were towed. We have a parking problem, a road problem. Unfortunately, two cars can't pass each other side by side. Other than that, I love where the houses are in the neighbourhood. Because it's in the heart of the bazaar."

Balibey and Hacirüstem are neighbourhoods located in the Old Muğla Region, where basic necessities such as sewage and other infrastructure services may be problematic. Despite these issues, these neighbourhoods are particularly preferred by low-income residents in Muğla due to their proximity to the city center and affordable rents. However, motivations for settling in these neighbourhoods also include maintaining family traditions spanning generations and staying close to families who have previously migrated to the same area. In Muğla, a small city context, it has been observed that some participants do not even venture out of their neighbourhoods to other parts of the city.

R (researcher): Why did you choose Muğla then? Why Muğla instead of somewhere else?

G4: "Because, I don't know. We finished school and came here. I can't do it anywhere else. For example, there's Gökova nearby. Even when I go there for a day, I can't stay, I'm used to it here. This is my own region... No matter what you say or how you think, there's Akyol over there. I won't go to Akyol. My route is always clear."

G7: "Even the military service was so difficult when I left Muğla. I can't explain it to you. There's a martyrdom monument here now, I kissed the ground there when I got off the bus, when I came back from the army."

However, for some respondents, the neighbourhood has a more limited significance. It is seen as a temporary solution that should be replaced with neighbourhoods like Emirbeyazıt and Orhaniye when better economic conditions are achieved. Respondents have expressed their desire to move, especially due to physical reasons such as the hilly structure of the neighbourhoods, relatively distant location from the city center and market, lack of parks for children, old housing, densely packed housing, and narrow roads.

G5: "Of course, I would have liked to live in nicer places, but my means only allow me to stay here, the rent suits me, so I live here."

G25: "In Muğla, the neighbourhood we generally like the most is Emirbeyazıt Neighbourhood. It's a bit more peaceful and nice, for example. I love that neighbourhood a lot. But because rents are expensive, it's not feasible."

R: So, if you could, if you had the means, would you want to live elsewhere?

G8: "No, not outside Muğla."

R: I mean, I asked about the neighbourhood as well.

G8: "Of course, I would like to."

R: For example, where?

G8: "For example, the Orhaniye area."

Issues Related to Urban Living Practices

In the scope of the study investigating how urban poverty is experienced, it has been observed that participants frequently emphasize certain problems in their daily life experiences. These issues include high cost of living, unemployment, and security concerns, respectively. As mentioned earlier, alongside the high cost of renting housing in the city, which is reflected in statistics, participants, both migrants to the city and locals, also highlighted the high cost of various services and consumption opportunities in the city.

G13: "The downside is that it's economically tough in this city. It's not a city where a single person can easily manage to live. It's very tough. Really tough. Kitchen expenses, rent, from those angles, it's tough. The good side is, as I said, everything is within reach, there's no transportation problem, like a tax office, for example, it's right there, if you need to go to the bank, it's right there, there's no transportation problem."

G18: "Muğla is actually a place where you can live, in terms of transportation... You can get to anywhere in ten to fifteen minutes. Half an hour to the sea... But in terms of rent, it's actually an expensive city overall. With the money spent here... I mean, in a place not close to Muğla, somewhere more central or further east, two or three families can get by. But it's really expensive here, it's a different system... Sometimes we come back from the market with just one bag, I mean. Because there's no purchasing power. Our income stays the same but the prices of everything we buy change. There's no tradesmanship here, let me say. There's a sort of greed. They say 'my price is this, take it or leave it.' I'm a construction worker, I don't have insurance. There are others worse off than me. Thank God we're not hungry or homeless, but there's a general expensiveness here."

Various experiences related to unemployment were also shared during the interviews and observations in the field. For example, Syrian migrants work for lower wages, which leads to hostility towards migrants, job opportunities being temporary and insecure, jobs being only in the service sector, the absence of factories in the city, and experiences of finding and losing jobs during the pandemic were shared. Especially, women lamented about the issue of unemployment and it was observed that female employment is low.

G22: "For example, there are lots of factories in Izmir. They clean leeks, make preserves, or do packaging, it could have been something like that. After all, I could have done it from where I am. But there's no such opportunity here."

However, whether it's men or women, unemployment has been shared as the most frequently lamented issue in the interviews.

G20: "Well, Muğla is a nice place to live. I love Muğla a lot. But if you say for employment, our job opportunities in Muğla are very low. I can say that. There's nothing else that comes to mind."

G24: "We love Muğla, it's very beautiful but... If only there were jobs, my husband struggles because he doesn't work. Otherwise, we love Muğla."

G11: "...there's no job. We're unemployed, what else can I say? You can't have everything you want, you can't do everything you want. You want to go somewhere but if you don't have the means, you can't go. Like I said before, without the same amount of money, nothing works out."

G1: "There's no job opportunity. There's no job, I mean if I go to Izmir, for example, I could become a shoe polisher and run my business there. There are more alternative job opportunities, more factories there, but I don't see any factories here in Muğla. About 30 years ago, an airport was going to be built here, our mayor asked for 10,000 TL for land. Dalaman asked for 5,000 TL. The guy went there and built it. It was going to be built here in Muğla. Open a factory, man. Muğla's livelihood is olive, grape, wine factory, olive oil factory, I don't know, open an olive factory. What is the leading sector in agriculture, olive or honey? Open those, people go to work in Marmaris, come here for 6 months and stay. They don't have insurance. I still know someone who isn't married, works in tourism and can't set up a home. If there was a factory here, the guy would work and set up his home, he'd have a steady job, he'd work for 12 months. His spending would be more. The money he earns

from working for 6 months, how long will it last? He won't be able to spend it. If someone says, let me get a cola, he'll think, I don't work, so he'll spend his money accordingly."

G4: "You work thinking that if one thing doesn't work out, the other will. We don't have a textile factory here. We have shopping malls, marble factories, our municipality. We also have shoemakers, sock sellers, so-called restaurants, things like that. There's not a single factory in Muğla."

G14: "...for example, it's very different in terms of jobs. Since it's a big city, there are factories, job opportunities are easier there. It's not like here."

Another fundamental problem addressed by the respondents is security concerns. Security issues are discussed under three main headings: urban space-related security problems, human-generated security problems stemming from substance use, and security problems in schools. Looking at the first category, which is security problems stemming from the urban space, respondents particularly pointed out the narrow streets in these neighbourhoods, which are designated as urban conservation areas, due to the old housing texture of these areas. Below are the respondents' comments on how the narrow roads affect their daily lives:

G7: "Narrow. There are no sidewalks. There's no sidewalk to escape when a car comes. So, when we let the children out, we tell them to move to the side, but there's no side. Cars park on the sides too. There's nowhere else to put the car. I tell the child to move aside, 'Dad, where should I go? There's nowhere to go,' he says. You can't say anything to him."

G13: "Actually, the biggest problem in Muğla is the roads. Cars pass by rubbing against each other because they're parked. Otherwise, there's no problem, it's just a parking problem. If a fire breaks out here, the houses will burn to ashes until the cars are towed. We have a parking problem, a road problem. Unfortunately, two cars can't pass side by side. Otherwise, I love the neighbourhood where the house is located. Because it's in the market. Like this."

G14: "For example, our houses here, since it's a residential area, our roads are narrow. One entrance, one entrance, for example, one-way, two-way. For example, we've applied many times because our roads have small children, they suddenly jump out. The incoming vehicles are very fast, something like a speed bump should be made, but there's nothing, no activity in that regard. So, we're sorry about that."

G15: "For example, your child had cats, they were crushed. They pass without even turning back, regardless of whether it's a child or an elderly person."

The second category encountered regarding security concerns is substance use. The narrow, maze-like, complex, and dark streets of the neighbourhood make it difficult for police and security guards to patrol. In addition to this, caves, ruined houses, secluded areas along the stream route also turn into gathering places for substance users from the city. During observations in the neighbourhoods, lighter gas residues were found. Additionally, one of the interviewees mentioned that their son also uses it.

G5: "...For my 15-year-old son, what can I do? I'm thinking about that. I don't know how to ignite or inhale lighter gas. He doesn't do it at home, he drinks outside and comes home and says, 'Mom, I want to quit this. I've been using it since you got divorced, but when I don't use it, I'm in a very bad condition, I feel like I'm going crazy, I come to my senses when I use it'. I'm mad at myself, it means my eyes were so blind that I couldn't understand his condition. My sister didn't know anything, my daughter-in-law didn't understand anything, I don't know, I'm thinking about what I can do."

On the other hand, some respondents have emphasized feeling safe even though they are aware of substance use in the neighbourhood. However, a detailed account from a female respondent also highlights how the situation is perceived as a security issue by the neighbourhood.

G26: "There are people who use drugs and such."

R: Where do they usually hang out?

G26: "Usually, around Masa Mountain or in alleyways, late at night."

R: Have you heard about this from others? Or have you seen it yourself passing by here?

G26: "Not while passing by here, but from above, for example, when I go to walk my dog or in other situations... You see what they leave behind and you come across it."

R: *What do you see? What's there?*

G26: *"Usually, things like plastic bags or pills, you come across them while they're throwing them away."*

R: *Has anyone bothered you while you were walking around there?*

G26: *"I just run away directly, that's why..."*

R: *Have you reported it to anyone? The police, somewhere else...*

G26: *"I haven't because if you do, then we get into trouble here. Everyone knows each other here. There's no way..."*

R: *Are the people who go there usually familiar faces, or are they new?*

G26: *"They used to be familiar - known around the neighbourhood - but now it doesn't matter who it is, they just come."*

R: *Are they mostly outsiders, or are there locals who do it too?*

G26: *"Locals from Muğla... I mean, they're the faces we see on the streets."*

R: *So, these security situations are disturbing for the neighbourhood then. Is there anything else causing trouble?*

G26: *"I have a friend here. There's an old building right next to them. The police closed it off before, I think. They've complained several times, but nothing has been done afterwards, no precautions or anything. Still..."*

R: *Are they using that place too?*

G26: *"Yes, there's no curtain in the house, no furniture inside, nothing, the door is broken. They go in at night, do whatever they want to do there, then leave, and come back again the next day."*

Another neighbourhood resident has once again emphasized the security threat posed by abandoned houses in the neighbourhood being used by substance users.

G23: *"They can't deal with it, especially there's an old house in ruins over there..."*

R: *What does the neighbourhood do?*

G23: *"As neighbors, we chase them away, but they come back again later in the night after we've gone inside."*

G23: *"Especially substance use. Now, we have to take our children to and from places ourselves. For example, the mother takes them to the park and waits there for an hour. The child plays, but we didn't used to have to do that before."*

G11: *"It feels far away, like when you send them somewhere in the market, you want them to come back right away, you call them right away."*

R: *In this case, I assume you're also worried about the safety of the children?*

G11: *"I guess so. Now at night, I can't send my daughter anywhere. But if it's in the market, I'll tell her to go and get something from the store. But now at 8:00 at night, I can't send her to the market..."*

Substance use, as understood from the shared experiences of the respondents, complicates the use of public spaces at night, and also creates problems related to violence and harassment for the young individuals in the neighbourhood. Moreover, substance use has become prevalent among young residents, promoting, facilitating, and legitimizing this behavior, which also affects schools. Therefore, based on respondents' safety-related concerns, the third category identified pertains to school safety. Instances such as students using cigarette lighters to gain access to school grounds and interact with peers, alongside increasing reports of child abduction and abuse, have raised parental concerns about their children's safety at school. Despite the widespread adoption of private security measures in schools nationwide in recent years, it was observed that schools in the neighbourhoods where the study was conducted lack such private security.

R: *What are your expectations from the school?*

G22: My expectation from the school is security, to be honest. Security should be increased. Because we hear a lot of things...

R: So, you have security expectations.

G22: For example, anyone who shouldn't be allowed into the school shouldn't be able to enter.

R: Is the entrance comfortable?

G22: It used to be before, not now. Now, schools are already closed. I don't know what will happen next.

R: There should be security in every school.

G22: Well, I think so.

Experiences of Receiving Social Aid

One of the criteria considered when determining the study group for the field experience in the study was selecting neighbourhoods with the highest rates of receiving social assistance in the city. Throughout the entire research process, it was once again observed that the experience of receiving social aid was widespread throughout the neighbourhood. These aids sometimes include various supports such as food or money, but one prominent type of social assistance that almost every family applies for, particularly during the winter months, is the provision of coal.

While natural gas is used in the rest of the city due to the installation of gas pipelines, the residents of the protected area still use coal for heating, even if they are located in the city center. Due to reasons such as the inability to carry out excavation works in the neighbourhood and the protected status of the buildings, there are problems with sewage and natural gas transportation in these neighbourhoods, making coal the most important necessity during the winter months. When asked how they apply for coal assistance, it was observed that they are directed to seek assistance by their neighbour, an acquaintance, or the headman of the neighbourhoods.

R: Is your house heated with a stove? How do you obtain fuel, coal?

G24: Yes, coal. For example, the children's room is heated with wood, but we can't afford to heat it there because we live here. Coal is used in living room, and wood is used in other rooms; it's difficult, not gonna lie.

R: Don't you gather together when it's cold?

G24: Mostly, that's what we do. I told the headman, my husband got mad, but I said, "If you get mad, get mad." Thanks to our headman, he gave us a ton of coal. I won't lie, I'm grateful for what I received.

R: How did you feel?

G24: It was tough; I felt bad.

R: How was the headman's attitude?

G24: He was very good, very good. He says if you have any need, just tell me.

R: Why doesn't your spouse allow it?

G24: He says, "He helps today, but tomorrow he'll talk behind your back."

Experiencing receiving assistance as demeaning and seeing it as a potential threat, not being able to accept the need to apply for aid, not knowing how to benefit from assistance or being unaware of their rights, and refraining from seeking help due to thinking that others might need it more are some of the experiences mentioned by participants in their experience of receiving social aid.

R: How does receiving help make you feel?

G6: Well, it feels good in a way. But for me, it's bad. Why? Because there are people in worse situations. There are hungry people. I wanted it to go to them. But on the other hand, we see people who don't need it at all, retirees, I don't know, someone who has a two-story house, collects rent, and they still get help. There are people like that.

G22: *"I'm already a shy person, I went there with reluctance."*

Consumption Practices

Place-based studies have an important subheading: consumption preferences. The concept of urban poverty is not only about being deprived of consumption like others in consumer society, but also about being deprived of consumption to the same extent. Therefore, the research questions how residents of impoverished neighbourhoods, where the study was conducted, are integrated into and participate in urban consumption. It has been observed that the proximity of these neighbourhoods to the Thursday market, which is the most frequently used, economical, and easily accessible consumption channel in the city, makes it a primary choice for residents. The market influences not only food purchases but also serves as the primary choice for clothing, shoes, toys, stationery, knitting supplies, seeds, agricultural equipment, and home textiles. Additionally, the presence of discount supermarkets in the area complements purchases made at local neighbourhood stores. The allowance for credit purchases at these neighbourhood stores further encourages preference for them over the discount supermarkets in the region.

The experience of online shopping has been highlighted by a female respondent who emphasized the inadequacy of clothing for women who wear hijab in Muğla, and another female respondent who wanted to buy cheap clothes for her children.

G25: *"It's mixed, sometimes we order online. Mostly, we buy from there. Here, they ask for too much money because we wear hijab. Also, there's not much variety in hijab clothing here, so we mostly shop there."*

G2: *"Ideally, I would dress my children from better shops, you know, from the usual markets (laughs), I order online, during seasonal discounts. I do that for the children. As much as our budget allows."*

When asked about their attitudes toward using shopping malls and large supermarkets in the city, participants generally expressed a reluctance to prefer shopping malls. Within their consumption preferences, it was observed that they tend to avoid going to shopping malls where all kinds of consumption-related services are offered together. In fact, most participants either have never been to a shopping mall located 10 minutes away from the mentioned neighbourhoods or have visited a few times without making any purchases.

G17: *"Of course, we buy from the market... Where else would I dress from? Of course, it's not always possible, we can't always buy. I went to the shopping mall once or twice, my sister took me. If I say I bought something, it would be a lie."*

R: *Do you use shopping malls?*

G5: *No, no, I've never been to a shopping mall. Why? I don't know... I can't dare to go there, if I have money, I'll go.*

R: *What do you mean by daring?*

G5: *If my daughter likes something when we go there, and I can't afford it, I'd be upset, so I can't go, so she won't be upset. In that sense.*

R: *So you've never been to the shopping malls before?*

G5: *No, I've never been to those shopping malls before. If I say I've been, that would be a lie.*

In consumer society, where you consume from is as important as what you consume, and this aspect constitutes a significant topic within the concept of urban poverty. Participants' tendency to avoid shopping malls - a consumption space - even if they have the chance to find a product cheaper elsewhere, reflects a sense of social exclusion and self-isolation due to perceived stigma. This situation is related to feelings of inadequacy. Therefore, consumption preferences become a key topic in observing social exclusion, spatial segregation, and the phenomenon of urban poverty.

G26: *People are very prejudiced... Extremely prejudiced... For instance, not everyone has to wear Nike. For example, just because you don't wear Nike shoes, someone comes up to you and says, 'Oh, look at what he's wearing.'*

R: Where do you encounter this situation?

G26: I encounter this everywhere, at school, at the café, on the street, everywhere.

R: Because you don't consume the brands they consume. What happens then?

G26: They don't include you. They don't see you as someone who can fit into their status. Not only do they not include you, but when they mingle with others, they say, 'Are you hanging out with this guy?' and they push that person out of that environment.

R: So, there's an elitist attitude among young people. Do they segregate based on where they hang out?

G26: Yes, for example If you're sitting at Starbucks, they think 'that kid must be rich. Then we can include him in our group'. But if you're sitting at a cheaper café, for God's sake, why would you sit there, they do that thing. It's very much like they're looking down on people.

The amount of consumption, as well as where the consumed product is obtained, has also been emphasized regarding consumption preferences. Especially when it comes to clothing, the experience of using clothes given by others has also been shared by the respondents. On the other hand, a decrease in purchasing power has also been highlighted in the sharing of the respondents.

R: Do you shop at supermarkets, large ones?

G23: No, sir. We used to, not anymore.

R: Is it related to financial issues?

G23: It's about finances. For example, I used to buy sugar by the sack. But now, I pay five lira and buy five lira's worth of sugar.

Results, Discussion and Recommendations

This study, aimed at evaluating the lives of urban poor individuals in Muğla within the context of social exclusion and spatial segregation, shares similarities with other studies on urban poverty while also presenting unique characteristics specific to the neighbourhoods on the periphery of Muğla. Although the fieldwork was conducted under pandemic conditions and the economic circumstances of that time, it was found that the participants' statements included negative experiences related to social exclusion and spatial segregation. Given the current economic conditions, it is reasonable to predict that the participants' experiences would be more intensely negative if the study were conducted today. The following conclusions can be summarized based on the participants' narratives, field observations, and demographic data of the neighbourhoods.

The study area predominantly consists of residents who have migrated from rural parts of Menteşe, nearby provinces and districts, various parts of Turkey, and Roma-origin citizens. The primary reasons for settling in these neighbourhoods include economic poverty, influence of relatives and acquaintances, the presence of a cultural environment similar to where they came from, a lifestyle akin to their previous homes (e.g., houses with gardens, single or two-story houses, the ability to raise chickens and small livestock), strong community relations and solidarity, and inadequate employment, education, and health services in their places of origin. Similar reasons for migration have been identified in various studies (Buttler et al., 2023; Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022; Dubey & Mallah, 2015; Ekici & Tuncel, 2015; Karakuş, 2006). The "buffer mechanisms" concept introduced by Kiray (1964) is thought to function as buffer entities that help mitigate tensions and conflicts arising from societal changes during modernization and urbanization processes. These mechanisms assist in maintaining social order and play a crucial role in the transition from traditional to modern structures, easing adaptation issues during this period of change. Typically informal, they operate as non-official networks and institutions such as family units, kinship groups, neighbourhood solidarity networks, local associations, or religious communities. These institutions serve as vital mechanisms in meeting individuals' economic, social, and emotional needs, particularly in situations where formal institutions may be inadequate (Kiray, 1964). In the context of urban poverty and the sense of being pushed to the outskirts of the city, neighbours who find common ground in these circumstances serve as emotional support mechanisms for each other. Therefore, when participants emphasize "neighbourhood

relations" as a reason for their satisfaction with a place, it should not be deceptive but rather should be evaluated in this context. These relationships play a significant role in fostering community resilience and social cohesion amidst urban challenges.

It was found that these migrants have low education levels and engage in low-income jobs, with many households having both unemployed women and men willing to work. The primary reason for migration highlighted by participants was the educational needs of their children, influenced by the closure of village schools and the shift to a busing system. Educational migrations are one of the leading reasons for inter-provincial and rural-to-urban migrations in Turkey (Keleş, 2006). In this study, it has been observed that migrants from Muğla and its surrounding provinces still maintain ties with their places of origin, continuing to cultivate their vineyards, orchards, and fields in order to contribute to their economies. This practice can be seen as providing economic, psychological, and social support to them in coping with the city's challenging economic conditions.

When considering the findings from participants' narratives, observations, and field notes, it was concluded that individuals generally expressed satisfaction with living in the study area. However, they indicated that they would readily consider moving to better neighbourhoods, houses, and conditions if given the opportunity. Although they did not report direct exclusion or discrimination due to living in this area, they felt deprived of access to the opportunities available in the city's affluent areas. Factors such as the availability of parks, shopping and entertainment facilities, safer and healthier housing, a peaceful and secure neighbourhood environment, better schools, and parking facilities (considering the potential for owning private vehicles) contributed to feelings of deprivation, exclusion, and spatial segregation.

While there are various perspectives on the definition of urban poverty, it is possible to observe, feel, and understand a distinct type of poverty specific to Muğla's center (Menteşe). The research area, particularly inhabited by migrants, experiences visible issues such as juvenile delinquency, crime, substance abuse, neglect, domestic violence, and unemployment. Participants expressed a desire for activities such as shopping at malls and large markets (including discount chains), walking in parks, sitting in tea gardens or parks in the evenings, and attending cinema, theater, and concerts, highlighting the presence of urban poverty. Unlike other neighbourhoods in the city where corner shops have disappeared, these shops still exist in the study area and offer credit-based shopping, providing various goods that are not found in larger markets.

The research area exhibits notable poverty, as acknowledged by the participants themselves, who find it humiliating to receive aid and complain about the insufficiency of the assistance they receive. The area is within an urban protected site, making home renovations bureaucratically challenging and costly, a burden residents cannot afford. Collaboration between the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization and local municipalities is necessary to address these issues. To improve security, derelict buildings and caves should be closed, and frequent inspections with cameras and police should be implemented to prevent substance abuse in forested areas. More sports and cultural activities should be organized for children, and talented children should be supported. Economic support programs and vocational training for women should be developed, and more opportunities for selling their products should be provided. Education on child neglect and abuse should be offered, with municipalities, the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, and the Ministry of National Education working together. Additional support should be given to local schools, covering all expenses for economically disadvantaged children, and free supplementary courses should be provided when necessary.

This study on the experiences of urban poverty has highlighted the issues of high costs, unemployment, and security problems as frequent concerns in daily life. Participants noted the problem of high costs in renting houses and other services, while unemployment was a common concern among both locals and migrants. Women, in particular, face difficulties in finding employment, contributing to low female labor force participation and the prevalence of temporary, insecure jobs. Security issues stem from urban space, substance abuse, and safety problems in schools. The findings indicate that urban poverty is not solely an economic issue but also involves significant

social and security-related problems. Similar issues are identified in related research (Anzorena et al., 1998; Panori et al., 2019). High costs make it difficult for poor families in large cities to meet their basic needs, and unemployment exacerbates gender inequalities, hindering women's economic independence and lowering overall family well-being.

Security concerns significantly affect the quality of life for residents. Narrow and dark streets have become gathering spots for substance abusers, causing residents to live in fear, particularly at night. The presence of substance abuse among children and youths has increased safety concerns in schools, worrying parents about their children's safety. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive policies to combat urban poverty. Anakwenze and Zuberi (2013) indicate in their study how social disorder and violence weaken individuals' efficacy and increase feelings of powerlessness, contributing to serious mental health problems. In this study, the mentioned security issues and substance use may lead residents of poor urban neighbourhoods to feel similar powerlessness and insecurity in their daily lives. Considering the potential mental health problems these issues could cause, it is crucial to strengthen social services and security measures alongside economic support and employment creation programs (Gant, 2010). Improving the physical conditions of neighbourhoods, increasing green spaces, enhancing lighting and security measures, and implementing substance abuse prevention programs will improve the quality of life for both locals and migrants (Mouratidis, 2021; Pearce et al., 2016). In conclusion, this study demonstrates that urban poverty is a multifaceted issue requiring multidimensional solutions. Comprehensive approaches, including economic, social, and security policies, will more effectively mitigate the adverse effects of urban poverty.

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Ethical Declaration and Committee Approval

Throughout the entire research process, scientific, ethical, and citation guidelines have been meticulously followed.

The study received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Social and Human Sciences at Muęla Sıtkı Koçman University, as per the decision dated 13.11.2020 and numbered 41.

Proportion of the Authors' Contribution

All researchers contributed equally to this study.