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Community Engagement as a Mediator of Well-Being Among Syrian Refugee Youth in Jordan: A Quantitative Mediation Model

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ABSTRACT
Background: Syrian refugees in Jordan experienced protracted displacement conditions in which access to education and employment remained uneven, and well-being depended not only on material resources but also on social inclusion and belonging. Community engagement represented a potential mechanism through which structural opportunities translated into psychosocial outcomes for refugee youth.
Aim: This study examined whether community engagement/social inclusion mediated the relationships among educational access, employment opportunities, and well-being/future outlook among Syrian refugee youth in Jordan.
Methods: A cross-sectional quantitative design was used with a survey sample of Syrian refugee youth (N = 400). Constructs were measured using 5-point Likert scales: Educational Access (B1–B4), Employment Opportunities (C1–C4), Community Engagement/Social Inclusion (D1–D4), Gender-Related Experiences (E1–E3), and Well-being/Future Outlook (F1–F4). Exploratory factor analysis supported a five-factor structure, and reliability was acceptable across scales. Pearson correlations and mediation analyses were conducted, with covariates included for both the mediator and the outcome. Indirect effects were tested using bias-corrected bootstrapping (5,000 resamples).
Results: Educational access and employment opportunities positively predicted community engagement/social inclusion, and community engagement positively predicted well-being/future outlook. Bootstrapped indirect effects supported mediation for both predictors. After accounting for community engagement, direct effects of educational access and employment opportunities on well-being/future outlook were not statistically significant, indicating an indirect-only pattern.
Conclusion: Community engagement mediated the link between structural opportunities and well-being among Syrian refugee youth in Jordan, suggesting that education and employment initiatives were most beneficial when paired with strategies that strengthened participation, belonging, and inclusive social ties.
Keywords: Syrian refugees; community engagement; well-being; mediation; Jordan
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1. Introduction

Jordan has become a key host country for Syrian refugees, where what began as a temporary emergency has now become a long-term development challenge (Awamleh & Dupras, 2024). As this situation has persisted, it has created several difficulties, including strained public services, strict employment laws, and uneven access to opportunities based on where people live or the group they belong to (Awamleh & Dupras, 2024; Fallah et al., 2021). In such prolonged circumstances, the concern goes beyond basic survival. It becomes essential to consider whether refugees—especially young people—can live with dignity, develop emotionally, and plan their futures through education and work (Hynie, 2018; Niemi et al., 2019; Strang & Quinn, 2021).

Recent studies suggest that mental health among refugees is often shaped more by what happens after they arrive in a new country—such as housing, school, jobs, legal rights, and social connections—than by what they experienced before fleeing (Hynie, 2018). Moreover, international research has shown that social inclusion and active participation in community life are strongly linked to better emotional health and overall well-being among refugees and asylum seekers (Niemi et al., 2019; Strang & Quinn, 2021). This raises an important question for both researchers and policymakers: what conditions most influence refugee well-being, and how do they operate within Jordan's specific context?

In the Jordanian setting, two important factors affecting long-term well-being are access to education and job opportunities (Awamleh & Dupras, 2024; Fallah et al., 2021). Education is often seen as a path to better future choices, skill development, and emotional strength (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2018; Morrice & Salem, 2023; Salem, 2021). Yet, many refugees face significant barriers, including high costs, language differences, paperwork challenges, and poor learning environments (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2018; Morrice & Salem, 2023; Salem, 2021). Jordan has expanded access through double-shift schools, but this has raised concerns about the quality of learning, fairness, and the integration of refugee students into the national system (Morrice & Salem, 2023; Salem, 2021).

Likewise, employment is not only important for income—it can also bring purpose and reduce pressure on families (Seeberg, 2022; Şahin Mencütek & Nashwan, 2021). However, job options are often limited by legal hurdles, informal work conditions, and job-specific restrictions, which affect stability and self-worth (Seeberg, 2022; Şahin Mencütek & Nashwan, 2021). Viewing education and employment only in terms of their direct effects on well-being might miss the ways these areas connect with refugees' everyday social lives—especially when opportunities are unstable, short-term, or separated from the larger community (Seeberg, 2022; Şahin Mencütek & Nashwan, 2021; Morrice & Salem, 2023).

This is where community engagement becomes crucial (Berger-Schmitt, 2000; Strang & Quinn, 2021). It refers to joining local activities, being welcomed in public spaces, forming friendships with local people, and feeling a part of the society (Berger-Schmitt, 2000; Strang & Quinn, 2021). These aspects match broader ideas about social inclusion and belonging in a connected community (Berger-Schmitt, 2000; Strang & Quinn, 2021). From a social capital perspective, being engaged isn't just about being active—it also helps refugees access useful information, emotional support, mutual help, and informal learning or job opportunities. These forms of support can build mental strength and improve overall well-being (Putnam, 2000). Still, not everyone has the same chance to participate. Factors such as location, cultural norms, discrimination, lack of free time, and financial stress can limit engagement (Kuhnt et al., 2017; Meral et al., 2022).

Looking at engagement as a connecting factor helps explain how larger systems—such as education and labor markets—affect refugee well-being (Phillimore, 2021). This view suggests that how well refugees adapt depends more on the environments they live in, including institutions and local settings, than only on their personal history or traits (Phillimore, 2021). However, even when education and work opportunities are available, they may not improve lives unless they also create room for social inclusion, connection, and support networks (Kuhnt et al., 2017; Meral et al., 2022; Strang & Quinn, 2021).

There is strong research backing this view (Niemi et al., 2019; Strang & Quinn, 2021). Many studies show that being socially active and forming connections improve mental health and well-being among refugees, suggesting that engagement plays an important role in how other forms of support work (Niemi et al., 2019; Strang & Quinn, 2021). For young refugees in particular, feeling accepted and forming bonds with peers can significantly boost their emotional health (Correa-Velez et al., 2010). In Jordan, studies show that both material conditions—like housing and income—and social networks help Syrian refugees build resilience (Alduraidi et al., 2020; Alduraidi et al., 2022). Research with both Syrian and Jordanian women also finds that personal relationships, empowerment, and supportive environments are linked to social inclusion and improved well-being (Eggerman et al., 2023). These findings suggest a pattern: education and work may increase community involvement; in turn, that involvement helps improve emotional health and a sense of belonging; and ultimately, this leads to greater well-being and hope for the future (Eggerman et al., 2023; Alduraidi et al., 2022; Niemi et al., 2019).

Still, most studies in Jordan tend to focus either on education and work or on mental health, without directly exploring how community involvement might connect them (Jones et al., 2022; Strang & Quinn, 2021). At the same time, lived experiences—especially during major events like the COVID-19 pandemic—show how problems across different areas of life can accumulate, harming young people's well-being in more complex ways (Jones et al., 2022). A framework that highlights these links could offer new insights for both research and policymaking (Phillimore, 2021). It would help clarify whether access to education and jobs improves mental health directly, or if it mainly does so by making it easier for refugees to feel included, build relationships, and take part in community life (Kuhnt et al., 2017; Meral et al., 2022). This has big implications for how programs are designed. If community involvement is a key link, then offering more schooling or job training is not enough. These efforts must also include strategies that support social inclusion, remove barriers, and create welcoming spaces—especially in cities, where feelings of inclusion may vary (Kuhnt et al., 2017; Meral et al., 2022).

With this in mind, the present study focuses on community involvement as the connecting piece between education, employment, and the overall well-being of Syrian refugees in Jordan (Awamleh & Dupras, 2024; Fallah et al., 2021; Phillimore, 2021). By examining how each area influences the next, the study builds on research that emphasizes the importance of local conditions and available resources (Phillimore, 2021). It also treats social inclusion and connection as key elements that can be measured and studied in relation to emotional health (Berger-Schmitt, 2000; Strang & Quinn, 2021). The aim is to offer useful insights that can help Jordan move beyond emergency aid toward more long-term development strategies—ones that promote independence, shared community life, and equal opportunities for everyone (Awamleh & Dupras, 2024; Fallah et al., 2021). Ultimately, the study asks whether—and to what extent—community engagement serves as the missing link that

helps turn educational and job opportunities into real emotional and mental support, shaping how refugees feel about their lives, their support systems, and their future in Jordan.

This paper is organized into five sections. Following this introduction, the Literature Review presents previous research on refugee well-being, education, employment, and social inclusion. The Methodology section outlines the research design, data sources, and analytical approach. The Findings section discusses the results, focusing on how community engagement interacts with education and employment to influence well-being. The Discussion then reflects on these results in light of existing literature and policy implications. Finally, the Conclusion summarizes the key insights and suggests directions for future research and practical interventions in refugee-hosting contexts like Jordan.

2. Literature review

2.1 Refugee well-being and psychosocial integration

Refugee well-being during forced displacement is shaped by many connected factors, including emotional health, social connections, living conditions, and the environment they enter after leaving their home country. Recent studies show that a refugee's overall quality of life is influenced not just by what happened before they fled, but more often by the conditions they face in the country where they resettle. These conditions include their legal status, access to stable housing, education, and employment, as well as whether they experience discrimination or have supportive relationships (Hynie, 2018; Kemmak et al., 2021; Campbell et al., 2018). In long-term displacement, these issues can build up over time, putting strain on everyday life, family dynamics, and how refugees see their chances for the future. As living environments and social conditions change, so too does their well-being—it is not a fixed state but one that evolves (Mendola & Pera, 2022; Boardman et al., 2022). Generally, well-being includes how people feel about their lives—such as life satisfaction and emotional stability—as well as the resources they can depend on, like social support and confidence in their own abilities (Boardman et al., 2022; Hynie, 2018).

Studies on refugees often separate two related ideas: subjective well-being and psychosocial integration. Subjective well-being refers to how people personally assess and experience their lives, often measured through how satisfied they feel and whether they have emotional support. Among refugees, these feelings are strongly influenced by whether they can meet basic needs and feel safe in their daily lives (Campbell et al., 2018; Alduraidi et al., 2020). Psychosocial integration, in contrast, focuses on how well refugees connect with others in society. It includes feeling welcome, building meaningful relationships with local people, and engaging in everyday community activities (Strang & Quinn, 2021; Niemi et al., 2019). Although these two concepts differ, they are closely linked. Research consistently shows that taking part in social life and forming supportive relationships is related to better mental health outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers. Therefore, being socially included both protects mental health and helps other support systems work more effectively (Niemi et al., 2019; Wachter et al., 2022). This is especially true for young refugees, as their well-being often depends on whether they feel they belong and can form friendships in their new environment (Correa-Velez et al., 2010).

Time also plays an important role in understanding refugee well-being. Refugees are not only concerned with their current conditions but also with their chances of building a secure future. Because of this, many researchers see hope, plans for the future, and aspirations as key parts of well-being—especially for young people. A positive outlook reflects whether someone feels they have opportunities, the ability to make choices, and the confidence to plan. These feelings are closely tied to refugees' ability to access education and work in their host country (Hynie, 2018; Donato & Ferris, 2020). This forward-looking aspect becomes even more critical in situations of long-term displacement. When people live with ongoing uncertainty—about their legal status, freedom of movement, or right to remain—this can harm their mental health, even when their basic needs are met (Taylor, 2013; Hannafi & Marouani, 2023). Moreover, how refugees see their future often influences whether they want to settle in the host country. These decisions are closely linked to whether they feel safe, accepted, and able to build a stable life (Hannafi & Marouani, 2023). As a result, well-being among refugees is not just about how they feel now, but also about whether they can see a clear and achievable path forward, despite the limits that displacement places on their lives.

In Jordan, this understanding of refugee well-being is particularly relevant. Research points to widespread mental health concerns among Syrian refugees, including teenagers. Many of them face emotional struggles alongside challenges in accessing schools, finding jobs, and participating in community life (Beni Yonis et al., 2020; Alduraidi et al., 2020). Times of economic difficulty or health crises—such as during the COVID-19 pandemic—have made these issues worse, especially for young people in both refugee and host communities. Such moments reveal how several problems can overlap, creating deeper inequality and harming emotional

health (Jones et al., 2022). Importantly, this research shows that psychosocial integration should not be seen as an extra or minor outcome. It is deeply connected to whether refugees can access support, build trust in their communities, and feel safe in social settings. These factors influence how people cope with challenges, stay resilient, and manage daily life (Wachter et al., 2022; Strang & Quinn, 2021).

Additionally, gender roles and cultural background shape how these experiences unfold. Public mental health research shows that social norms and expectations can shape both how people express emotional distress and how easily they can reach out for help (Çetrez et al., 2021; Crawford et al., 2023). Altogether, this body of work supports the idea that refugee well-being results from the combination of social relationships, access to resources, and long-term perspectives. Within this view, psychosocial integration plays a key role, serving as the link between community engagement and the personal experience of living well during displacement.

2.2 Structural inclusion as opportunity pathways

Structural inclusion refers to how refugees can participate in and benefit from essential systems—especially education and employment—in ways that are steady, fair, and likely to improve their lives over time. Recent research stresses that the success of refugee integration is shaped more by the policies, institutional strength, and local settings in the host country than by refugees' own characteristics (Donato & Ferris, 2020; Phillimore, 2021). In countries like Jordan, where displacement becomes long-term, structural inclusion is the set of conditions that allow refugees to build skills, gain qualifications, earn income, reduce insecurity, and rebuild a sense of control over their lives. However, simply having access is not enough. Positive outcomes are more likely when involvement in these systems is ongoing and linked to meaningful social connections that foster trust, belonging, and access to daily resources (Kuhnt et al., 2017; Meral et al., 2022).

Within this approach, education and employment are seen as the two most important pathways for improving both present living conditions and prospects. Education helps people expand their abilities, develop long-term goals, and plan for the future. Employment, on the other hand, provides financial stability and helps restore a sense of purpose, independence, and dignity (Betts, 2021; Dryden-Peterson et al., 2018). Still, in Jordan, these pathways are often constrained by financial hardship, language and learning challenges, paperwork requirements, and tight labor-market rules. These barriers often affect young people and women the most (Morrice & Salem, 2023; Şahin Mencütek & Nashwan, 2021).

2.2.1 Educational access as capability expansion

Education is seen as a key way to expand refugees' capabilities because it helps them build useful skills, set future goals, and find pathways into work and community life. For young refugees, school also provides structure and social interaction, which can help improve emotional well-being and the feeling of progress. However, enrolling in school does not guarantee inclusion. The quality of education, the language used for instruction, whether students can move smoothly through different levels, and whether they feel respected and fairly treated all affect outcomes (Abamosa et al., 2020; Dryden-Peterson et al., 2018). In Jordan, while double-shift schools have increased access, they have also raised concerns about fairness, learning quality, and the extent to which refugee students are truly integrated into the national system (Morrice & Salem, 2023; Salem, 2021). These issues are important because education only supports future planning when the learning experience is strong and seen as meaningful.

Refugees often face many overlapping barriers to education. Costs related to transportation, school supplies, fees, and lost income opportunities can make attending school difficult. Even if space is available, differences in language and curriculum can lower learning outcomes and reduce the value students and families see in education (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2018). Access to higher education or job-related training is often further limited by the need for documents, few program openings, or policies that unintentionally exclude refugees. This can make it harder to move from education into employment or long-term integration (Abamosa et al., 2020). Overall, education becomes a true opportunity pathway when it supports consistent participation, real learning, and a positive school experience. These factors are strongly connected to whether education helps build hope, ambition, and a vision for the future (Morrice & Salem, 2023; Salem, 2021).

2.2.2 Employment opportunities and dignity/stability

Work plays a central role in helping refugees become part of society because it affects their financial situation, family stability, and emotional health. Research on livelihoods shows that employment offers more than income—it also gives people structure, a sense of identity, and confidence. In contrast, unstable or exploitative work often increases stress and insecurity (Betts, 2021; Skran & Easton-Calabria, 2020). This makes job quality very important. Work that matches a person's skills, provides steady hours, and offers fair pay is more likely to

improve well-being than jobs that are temporary, unsafe, or poorly paid. In many host countries, refugees face common challenges such as underemployment, working in informal jobs, or not being able to use their skills. These issues limit how much employment can improve their lives and help them plan for the future (Seeberg, 2022; Şahin Mencütek & Nashwan, 2021).

In Jordan, legal rules and policies significantly shape refugees' access to employment. Studies on Syrian refugees show that limits on job sectors, the need for work permits, and complex paperwork all affect who can work and under what conditions. These restrictions often push refugees into informal or unstable jobs (Seeberg, 2022; Şahin Mencütek & Nashwan, 2021). The fragile nature of the job market became especially clear during the COVID-19 pandemic, when both refugees and locals experienced sudden changes in employment, revealing how easily income can be disrupted in long-term displacement situations (Wahby & Assaad, 2024). These findings show that employment is about more than just having a job. What matters is whether work provides stability, matches people's skills, and fits within a workable system of rules. These factors are central to whether work actually improves well-being and offers a sense of future security (Betts, 2021; Seeberg, 2022).

2.3 Community engagement/social inclusion as a mechanism

Community engagement and social inclusion represent the social side of integration, focusing on how refugees connect with the people and institutions around them. These ideas involve taking part in local activities, being welcomed in public spaces, building positive relationships with members of the host society, and feeling a sense of belonging. They are widely recognized as key parts of social cohesion and are strongly linked to better emotional and mental health. Foundational studies define social cohesion as shared belonging and active participation, while theories of social capital explain that strong networks and common values help individuals access support, information, and useful resources they might not get on their own (Berger-Schmitt, 2000; Putnam, 2000). In the context of refugee resettlement, engagement is not just a result of integration. Instead, it acts as a bridge—turning access to education and work into real, meaningful experiences that help people feel connected and supported.

Access to education and jobs can foster greater social engagement by increasing day-to-day contact, encouraging connections across groups, and creating shared experiences within schools or workplaces. These interactions can offer emotional encouragement, practical advice, and informal chances for growth, all of which can improve well-being and help refugees look ahead with greater optimism (Alduraidi et al., 2022; Eggerman et al., 2023). However, if school or work environments are separated, unstable, or marked by discrimination, meaningful contact may be limited or negative. In such cases, even when formal access is provided, it may not lead to a stronger sense of belonging or social support. As a result, the potential psychological benefits of inclusion may not materialize because the social relationships needed to foster well-being do not develop.

Studies from a range of displacement settings consistently show that social engagement plays a vital role in shaping mental health. Stronger connections with others are associated with better emotional well-being, while isolation—even when basic needs are partly met—is linked to poorer mental health outcomes (Strang & Quinn, 2021). Broader reviews also highlight that being socially active and feeling included help protect mental health among refugees and asylum seekers, suggesting that inclusion serves as a pathway to well-being rather than simply an end goal (Niemi et al., 2019). In Jordan, research focused on urban refugee populations shows that access to services, the design of local neighborhoods, and the presence of inclusive institutions all influence whether refugees can engage in community life and connect with residents (Meral et al., 2022).

Studies focused on young people further show that the likelihood of interaction and participation often depends on where they live, which, in turn, shapes their experiences of social connection and unity (Kuhnt et al., 2017). Additional research on Syrian refugees and Jordanian women finds that social ties and a sense of empowerment are linked to well-being. These findings support the idea that being involved in one's community can strengthen support systems and make it easier to access shared resources (Eggerman et al., 2023). Overall, this body of research supports the view that community engagement and inclusion play a key role in turning access to education and work into better mental health and a more positive outlook for the future.

2.4 Cross-cutting constraints

2.4.1 Gendered experiences

Gender plays a significant role in shaping refugees' access to education and employment. It influences mobility, personal safety, household responsibilities, and how individuals are treated in public and institutional spaces. For adolescents and young adults, gender expectations can determine whether they stay in school, participate in mixed-gender environments, or pursue certain educational or training opportunities. These expectations can

affect whether education leads to future planning and the development of personal goals (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2018; Sajdi et al., 2021). Gender also impacts how fair and respectful everyday experiences feel—both in social settings and in formal institutions. These perceptions are essential for social inclusion, as they influence whether individuals feel encouraged to seek opportunities, engage with others, and participate in life beyond the home (UNHCR, 2021; Crawford et al., 2023).

Challenges related to gender are especially visible in employment. In Jordan, Syrian refugee women face multiple barriers due to job market regulations, limited sectors of employment, and poor job conditions. These challenges are further compounded by gender roles and caregiving responsibilities, which can make it harder for women to join the workforce or maintain steady jobs (Şahin Mencütek & Nashwan, 2021; Seeberg, 2022). In addition, the quality of available jobs is often shaped by gender. Whether jobs align with individuals' skills, offer reliable hours, and ensure safe working conditions can determine if employment contributes positively to well-being, or instead adds to stress and instability (Şahin Mencütek & Nashwan, 2021). Research on both Syrian refugee and Jordanian women also shows that social connections and opportunities for involvement are closely tied to emotional well-being and empowerment. This suggests that when women have limited access to networks, their ability to gain support and resources is also restricted (Eggerman et al., 2023).

Data from the research sample shows a clear gender gap in how participants perceive access to employment. Males reported significantly higher job-opportunity scores than females. This finding highlights gender as a serious constraint and supports the idea that access to opportunities—and their impact on well-being—may not operate the same way across genders. These patterns need to be considered when interpreting the outcomes of education or employment programs (Sajdi et al., 2021; Şahin Mencütek & Nashwan, 2021).

2.4.2 Urban–rural disparity

Where refugees live also affects their chances of inclusion, as geography shapes access to services, transportation, institutions, and social interaction spaces. In Jordan, most displaced people live in cities, where services, training programs, job opportunities, and community organizations are concentrated. Refugees living in rural or peri-urban areas often face challenges such as limited public transport and fewer services, which can make it harder to participate in everyday activities and access support systems (Meral et al., 2022). These location-based disadvantages can result in lower community engagement and fewer chances to form connections with members of the host society—both of which are vital for developing a sense of belonging and strengthening social bonds (Kuhnt et al., 2017).

Studies focusing on young people in Jordan show that the strength of social connections depends heavily on local context. When refugees are geographically isolated, it can reduce opportunities for interaction between different groups and weaken the informal networks that help people feel included (Kuhnt et al., 2017). This is supported by qualitative findings from this study, which indicate that those living in rural areas tend to have fewer opportunities for engagement. As a result, where a refugee lives—whether in an urban center or a more remote location—should be considered an important factor in evaluating levels of participation and social inclusion (Meral et al., 2022).

2.5 Hypotheses Development

Access to education is often linked with broader social inclusion, as schools offer a space where young people can regularly interact, form friendships, and take part in shared routines that go beyond academics. Studies on refugee education suggest that being part of the national school system can help students feel socially connected and included—especially when they are treated fairly and can participate meaningfully (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2018). Research from Jordan shows that how students experience school life, including whether they feel respected and included, can influence whether education helps them connect with the wider community or contributes to feelings of separation (Morrice & Salem, 2023; Salem, 2021). Similar findings from other countries suggest that peer relationships and social acceptance are important for adjustment and well-being, especially for young people, indicating that education may open doors to broader community involvement (Correa-Velez et al., 2010). Based on this literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Educational Access → Community Engagement (positive).

Work opportunities are also expected to encourage community involvement, since having a job can lead to daily interaction, build social networks, and create informal channels for sharing information and support. The opportunity-structure approach emphasizes that successful integration depends largely on access to key systems, such as employment and education. When employment is stable and meaningful, it can serve as a powerful tool for inclusion (Phillimore, 2021; Donato & Ferris, 2020). Studies focusing on workplace inclusion show that having a job can help refugees engage more with society by connecting them to networks and to life outside their

household (Knappert et al., 2020). In Jordan, however, the ability to access and maintain employment is influenced by legal rules and job market limitations, which can either support inclusion or leave individuals feeling isolated and insecure in their work (Seeberg, 2022; Şahin Mencütek & Nashwan, 2021). Based on this literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Employment Opportunities → Community Engagement (positive).

There is strong evidence that community participation and social ties are associated with better mental health among refugees. Reviews of mental health research show that post-displacement well-being is shaped not only by material needs but also by social factors—such as feeling supported and included in daily life (Hynie, 2018; Niemi et al., 2019). Studies have consistently found that strong social ties lead to improved well-being, while isolation often worsens psychological outcomes, even when basic needs are being met (Strang & Quinn, 2021). From a social cohesion perspective, being involved and feeling like you belong are key features of inclusive communities (Berger-Schmitt, 2000). Social capital theory holds that relationships and shared norms can provide individuals with access to emotional support, useful information, and practical help, all of which help manage stress and improve resilience (Putnam, 2000). Specific studies focused on Syrian refugees support these ideas, especially those that highlight how social networks benefit refugee women's emotional well-being in Jordan (Alduraidi et al., 2022; Eggerman et al., 2023). Based on this literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Community Engagement → Well-being/Future Outlook (positive).

Existing research also suggests that engagement with the community is one of the ways that education affects well-being and hope for the future. Taking part in school increases the chances of connecting with others, joining shared activities, and reducing feelings of isolation—factors that support mental and emotional health. However, the positive effects of education are much stronger when students feel respected and are allowed to participate meaningfully, as highlighted in education-integration studies (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2018; Morrice & Salem, 2023). Research on social engagement also shows that it acts as a safeguard for mental health, supporting the idea that education improves well-being partly by helping students feel more connected (Niemi et al., 2019; Strang & Quinn, 2021). Based on this literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Community Engagement mediates Educational Access → Well-being/Future Outlook.

A similar indirect link is expected for employment. Having a job may improve well-being not only through income but also by creating regular routines, building social ties, and offering access to community resources. Studies on refugee livelihoods show that work helps individuals regain a sense of identity and dignity—especially when jobs are stable and free from exploitation (Betts, 2021; Skran & Easton-Calabria, 2020). Research on workplace integration indicates that employment can lead to greater community involvement, supporting the idea that work may indirectly influence well-being through engagement (Knappert et al., 2020). In Jordan, the impact of work on well-being is closely tied to legal restrictions and the strength of the labor market, which affect whether jobs can truly support personal and social stability (Seeberg, 2022; Wahby & Assaad, 2024). Based on this literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Community Engagement mediates Employment Opportunities → Well-being/Future Outlook.

Gender-based experiences often shape both access to opportunities and levels of social involvement. Research on refugee and immigrant women shows that they face multiple, overlapping barriers to education, employment, and equal treatment (Crawford et al., 2023). In Jordan and similar countries, women's ability to join the workforce is often limited by social norms, caregiving roles, and labor-market restrictions, all of which affect their chances of inclusion and community engagement (Şahin Mencütek & Nashwan, 2021; Seeberg, 2022). Research on Syrian adolescent refugees further highlights how gender influences daily experiences and hopes for the future, making it clear that gendered barriers need to be considered when analyzing opportunity access and engagement (Sajdi et al., 2021). International policy guidance on age, gender, and diversity also confirms that discrimination and unequal treatment are major challenges for inclusion (UNHCR, 2021). Based on this literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Gender-related experiences (or gender) associate with Employment Opportunities and/or Community Engagement.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents a framework illustrating how access to education and employment—defined here as structural inclusion—affects refugee well-being and future outlook, particularly when it leads to greater community involvement. This model reflects the view that integration depends more on the systems and opportunities available in the host country than on individual refugee characteristics (Donato & Ferris, 2020; Phillimore, 2021). Education and employment are treated as key structural pathways, providing skills, income, and interaction with institutions that can either support or hinder inclusion (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2018; Seeberg, 2022; Şahin Mencütek & Nashwan, 2021). In Jordan, studies show that both the experience of school integration (Morrice & Salem, 2023; Salem, 2021) and the legal and regulatory conditions of employment (Seeberg, 2022; Şahin Mencütek & Nashwan, 2021; Wahby & Assaad, 2024) are central to how inclusion unfolds.

At the core of the framework is community engagement and social inclusion, which mediate the relationship between structural access and psychosocial outcomes. This concept includes participation in social life, a sense of acceptance, and meaningful ties with the host community. It draws on theories that view shared belonging as critical to well-functioning societies (Berger-Schmitt, 2000; Galabuzi & Teelucksingh, 2010; Oxoby, 2009) and on social capital theory, which emphasizes the value of emotional and practical support in uncertain conditions (Putnam, 2000). Empirical evidence confirms that strong social ties are consistently linked to better mental health among refugees, while isolation worsens outcomes—even when material needs are met (Niemi et al., 2019; Strang & Quinn, 2021; Boardman et al., 2022). Regional studies also highlight the importance of social cohesion for refugee well-being (Habib et al., 2020; Eggerman et al., 2023).

The framework's outcome—well-being and future outlook—refers to perceived quality of life, emotional support, and hope for the future. These outcomes are shaped by post-displacement conditions, including access to education, employment, housing, legal rights, and social ties (Hynie, 2018; Kemmak et al., 2021). Education and employment improve well-being not only through material stability but also by building confidence and agency. The model captures both direct effects of access and indirect effects through engagement and inclusion. This reflects evidence that structural opportunities lead to better psychosocial outcomes when they also enable social participation (Putnam, 2000; Niemi et al., 2019; Strang & Quinn, 2021). Supporting programs that enhance social cohesion has been shown to strengthen refugee well-being (Lowe, 2022; World Bank, 2023; Zintl & Loewe, 2022).

To account for variation, the framework includes control variables such as age, gender, education level, employment status, time in Jordan, legal documentation, place of residence, and receipt of organizational support. These factors shape both access to opportunities and social engagement (Hynie, 2018; Meral et al., 2022). Gender is especially influential, as women face specific barriers in education, work, and public participation that affect social ties and mental health (Crawford et al., 2023; Sajdi et al., 2021; UNHCR, 2021). Urban-rural differences also matter: access to services and participation opportunities vary by location, and local conditions strongly influence social cohesion (Kuhnt et al., 2017; Meral et al., 2022).

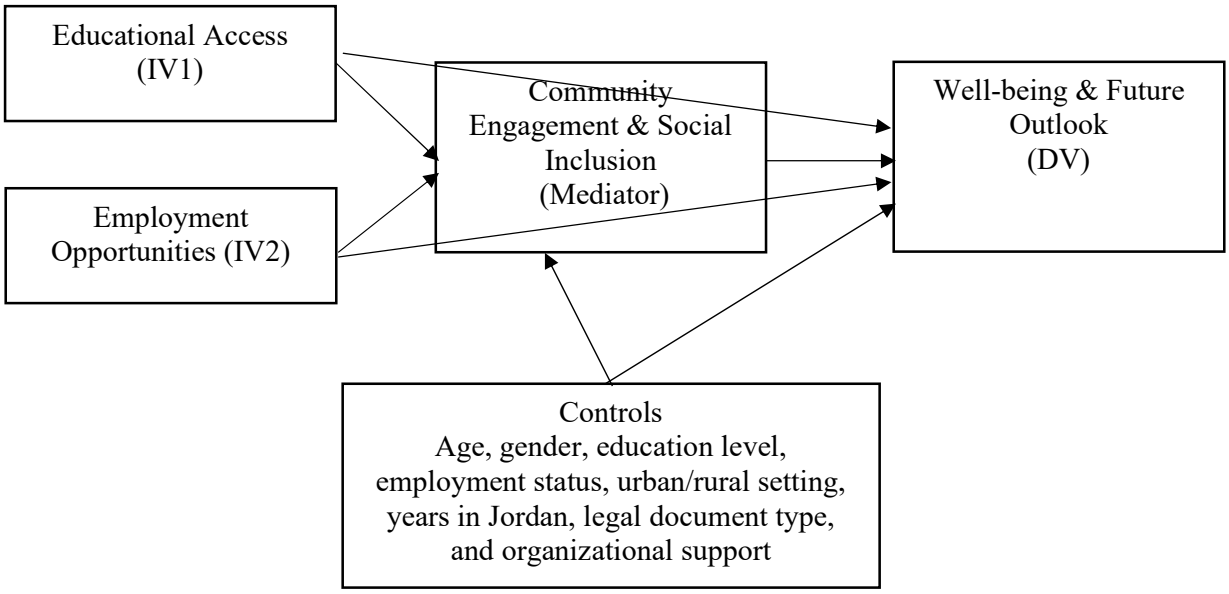

Figure 1. *Conceptual framework*

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Design

This research used a cross-sectional survey design to examine how structural inclusion influences well-being and future expectations. It looked at whether community engagement and social inclusion help explain the connection between access to education and employment (the main variables) and the outcomes of well-being and future outlook. This approach aimed to examine both direct and indirect links among the variables, drawing on previous research about refugee integration (Fowler, 2014; Bryman, 2016). The tools used in the study were developed using a step-by-step approach that started with qualitative methods. Interviews and focus groups helped identify key ideas and make sure that the survey questions were appropriate for the context. This

approach, known as a sequential exploratory design, is well-suited to studying complex social issues such as refugee inclusion (Plano Clark, 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Insights from the initial qualitative stage guided the design of the final structured questionnaire, which was used to test the study's main ideas with a larger group (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Bryman, 2016).

Since the data were collected at a single point in time, any mediation effects were interpreted as possible indirect relationships rather than cause-and-effect connections. This approach aligned with the study's goal of exploring whether community involvement helps explain how access to education and jobs relates to overall well-being and future outlook (Fowler, 2014; Field, 2013).

3.2 Setting and Participants

The study took place in Jordan, one of the countries hosting the largest number of Syrian refugees. It explored how factors like access to education and jobs, local community conditions, and regional differences in opportunities affected how included refugees felt. Participants were Syrian refugee youth and young adults living in both cities and rural areas. A total of 400 individuals were selected to enable reliable analysis and capture differences based on background characteristics such as gender and location.

To take part in the study, individuals had to meet four criteria: be Syrian nationals with refugee status in Jordan, be within the age range defined in the study, live in one of the selected areas, and be able to provide informed consent. The sampling strategy aimed to include participants from diverse genders and regions, as these factors can influence experiences of inclusion and integration (Bryman, 2016). Data were collected using a structured survey that included Likert-scale items, a commonly used instrument in studies of social inclusion and mental health (Fowler, 2014). The study followed strict ethical guidelines for working with refugees and other vulnerable populations. These included making participation voluntary, ensuring participants understood the study before giving consent, protecting their privacy, and paying attention to their well-being during the survey process (Hennink et al., 2020; Deps et al., 2022). Data from local community members involved in the broader research were only used for background comparisons. The main analysis focused solely on responses from Syrian refugee participants to test the study's model.

3.3 Measures and Operationalization

Each concept in the study was measured using several survey questions on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The average score for each set of questions was used to derive a final value for each concept, facilitating comparisons across topics (Fowler, 2014; DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021). The study followed the following categories:

Employment Opportunities (C1–C4): This set of questions asked participants about their views on job access and quality, including job stability and accessibility. The responses were averaged into a single score, with higher values indicating more positive views of job opportunities.

Community Engagement / Social Inclusion (D1–D4): These items measured participants' sense of community involvement, their sense of inclusion, and the positivity of their interactions with locals. The average of the four items was used to represent this construct, with higher scores showing more active involvement and inclusion.

Gender-Related Experiences (E1–E3): This measure captured how participants experienced gender-related issues in accessing education and jobs, and whether they felt they were treated fairly. One item (E3), which measured feelings of equality, was adjusted if needed so that all items pointed in the same direction—toward better gender inclusion. The final score was the average of the three responses.

Well-being / Future Outlook (F1–F4): This section included questions about emotional support, life satisfaction, and future expectations. All four items were averaged into a single score. However, one item (F4), which might reflect a desire to leave or return to another country, was reverse-scored to ensure that higher scores consistently indicated a more stable and hopeful future. An alternative version of the scale that excluded this item was also created, as some research suggests that wanting to migrate may reflect a different issue from emotional well-being.

Reverse-Coding: To ensure consistency, negatively phrased questions (e.g., barriers) were recoded so that higher scores reflected more positive outcomes. Specifically, items B2, B3, and C2 were reverse-coded for this reason. Item E3 was only reverse-coded if it originally described a barrier. This process ensured that, across all areas, higher scores indicated better conditions (Field, 2013; DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021).

Reliability: The reliability of each group of items was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, a standard method for assessing the extent to which items measure the same concept (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

3.4 Data Screening and Assumptions

Before analyzing the data, the responses were checked to make sure they were complete. Summary statistics were based solely on valid responses, ensuring an accurate representation of participants' views on each topic.
Since all main variables were based on the averages of several Likert-scale items, each scale was tested for normality using several methods: the Shapiro–Wilk test, measures of skewness and kurtosis, and visual tools such as histograms and Q–Q plots. Although the Shapiro–Wilk test often showed significant results (which is common with large samples), the other tests indicated that the data were roughly symmetrical. Based on this, it was appropriate to use parametric tests for later analysis. For a more detailed analysis, the study also examined the basic assumptions underlying correlation and regression methods. These included confirming that relationships between variables were linear, that the scores were normally distributed, and that the data were evenly distributed across levels. Tests for multicollinearity showed no problems, as all values were well below the standard concern threshold of 2.0.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

To check whether the survey scales in the Syrian Refugee questionnaire accurately measured what they were intended to, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was carried out using principal axis factoring with oblimin rotation. The data were suitable for this type of analysis, as indicated by a high sampling adequacy score (KMO = 0.891) and a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity. The analysis supported a five-factor structure, which aligned with the tool's theoretical design and explained 72.4% of the total variation in the data. The strength of the relationships between items and their factors ranged from .66 to .88, and no items loaded heavily onto more than one factor, meaning that each scale measured a distinct concept.

The internal consistency of the scales was measured using Cronbach's alpha, with values ranging from 0.79 to 0.87. These scores show that the scales were reliable and suitable for combining individual items into single summary scores. According to standard guidelines, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 or higher is considered acceptable for multi-item measures. Additionally, the questionnaire's test-retest reliability was confirmed through a test-retest procedure, in which participants provided similar responses at two separate time points, indicating that the measures were stable.

Experts in forced migration, social inclusion, and mixed-methods research reviewed the questionnaire to ensure that the items covered all important areas and were understandable for the intended participants. The survey question design was also based on themes identified in earlier qualitative work and aligned with the study's theoretical approach. If required by the publishing journal, the measurement model can be confirmed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) within a structural equation modeling (SEM) framework, with standard fit indices such as CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR.

3.6 Statistical Analysis

Before running deeper analyses, summary statistics—including averages, standard deviations, and score ranges—were calculated for each composite variable. Then, relationships between key variables were tested using Pearson correlations to examine both the strength and direction of these connections (Fowler, 2014; Field, 2013). The data were also checked for missing responses, outliers, and distribution patterns. Normality was assessed by examining skewness and kurtosis values, along with visual tools such as histograms and Q–Q plots. When appropriate, formal normality tests were used. Key assumptions for regression analysis, including linearity and equal variance (homoscedasticity), were assessed using residual plots (Field, 2013). Multicollinearity, which can affect regression accuracy, was assessed using tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) values; results showed no issues (Field, 2013).

The quality of the measurement tools was further confirmed through exploratory factor analysis, using the KMO and Bartlett's tests to assess suitability, and by examining the amount of variance explained and the extent to which items loaded onto the expected factors (Field, 2013; DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021). Internal reliability was again supported by Cronbach's alpha scores, consistent with common standards in social science research (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). If needed for publication, confirmatory factor analysis was planned within a structural equation modeling approach, with model fit assessed using CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR (Kline, 2016).

To test the study's main ideas, mediation analysis was conducted with two main predictors and one mediator. The analysis estimated the indirect paths (a-paths and b-paths) and the direct effect (c′) within a single model. Indirect effects were assessed using nonparametric bootstrapping with bias-corrected confidence intervals, which is the recommended method because these effects often don't follow a normal distribution (Preacher & Hayes,

2008; Hayes, 2018). Control variables were included as predictors of both the mediator and the outcome to reduce the risk of confounding. Additional checks were made to determine whether the results changed depending on how the migration/return intention item (F4) was coded and whether including Gender-Related Experiences as a control variable affected the outcomes. If there were sufficient participants in each group, further comparisons (e.g., by gender or rural vs. urban location) were examined within the SEM framework (Hayes, 2018; Kline, 2016).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical guidelines to protect the rights and well-being of refugees and other vulnerable individuals. Participation in the study was completely voluntary and based on informed consent. The consent process used clear and accessible language and explained the purpose of the research, what participants would be asked to do, how long it would take, possible risks and benefits, how their information would be kept private, and their right to skip questions or withdraw at any time without consequences (Hennink et al., 2020; Deps et al., 2022). Efforts were made to avoid any pressure or coercion, emphasizing that choosing not to take part would not affect participants' access to any services or support. Data collection was carefully designed to avoid any sense of obligation or unfair influence (Deps et al., 2022).

Protecting participants' identities and personal information was a priority throughout the project. No identifiable information was included in the data used for analysis. All responses were collected anonymously, stored securely, and accessed only by the research team. Results were presented in summary form to reduce the risk of identifying individuals, especially in smaller communities or among people with specific legal statuses (Deps et al., 2022). The research team used methods that were sensitive to participants' experiences, avoided intrusive questions, allowed participants to pause or stop the survey, and provided support resources if any emotional discomfort arose. The study was also careful to consider differences based on age, gender, and background to ensure fairness, respect, and protection from discrimination or unequal treatment (UNHCR, 2021; Deps et al., 2022).

4. Results

4.1 Sample Characteristics and Study Context

This study analyzed data from a sample of 400 Syrian refugee youth in Jordan, aged between 18 and 30. The age distribution shows a majority in the younger group (18–24 years, 60%), while 40% were aged 25–30. Gender representation was nearly equal, with 50.0% identifying as male and 49.3% as female; a small fraction (0.8%) chose not to disclose their gender.

In terms of education, the highest proportion had completed secondary education (34.0%), followed by university degrees or higher (30.5%). Vocational or technical education was reported by 15.5%, and 14.0% had only primary education. A minority (6.0%) reported having no formal education.

Employment status varied within the group: 49.5% were engaged in paid work, whether full-time, part-time, or self-employment. One-third (33.5%) were unemployed, while 17.0% identified as students. In terms of location, over half (54.0%) lived in urban areas, and the remaining 46.0% resided in rural settings. These findings align with broader trends indicating that displaced populations in Jordan often settle in urban centers, where access to services and opportunities tends to be greater.

Table 1. *Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 400)*

Variable	Category	n	%
Age band	18–24	240	60.0
	25–30	160	40.0
Gender	Male	200	50.0
	Female	197	49.3
	Prefer not to say	3	0.8
Education level	No formal education	24	6.0
	Primary education	56	14.0
	Secondary education	136	34.0
	Vocational/technical training	62	15.5
	University degree or higher	122	30.5
Employment status	Employed (full-time)	74	18.5
	Employed (part-time)	86	21.5
	Self-employed	38	9.5
	Unemployed	134	33.5
	Student	68	17.0
Residence	Urban	216	54.0
	Rural	184	46.0

4.2 Displacement and Settlement Experiences

Participants' migration timelines and settlement conditions varied widely. Nearly half (49.0%) arrived in Jordan between 2013 and 2018, while 21.0% arrived before 2013 and 27.0% came in 2019 or later. Most respondents had been in Jordan for more than three years (82.5%).

Residential mobility was notable, with 72.5% having lived in two or more locations since arriving. Relocation methods also varied: 43.0% moved independently, the UNHCR or NGOs assisted 37.0%, and 20.0% relocated with help from family or social networks.

Regarding legal status, 45.0% held UNHCR certificates, and 30.5% had Ministry of Interior cards. Others held temporary residency or alternative documents. Institutional support was common—UNHCR assistance was reported by 69.0%, and over half (53.0%) received support from international NGOs. Local NGOs and faith-based organizations also played a role, though a small group (14.0%) reported receiving no formal support. These findings reflect the significant role of formal institutions and legal frameworks in shaping refugee experiences in Jordan.

Table 2. *Displacement and Support Characteristics (N = 400)*

Variable	Category	n	%
Year of arrival	Before 2013	84	21.0
	2013–2015	112	28.0
	2016–2018	96	24.0
	2019–2021	64	16.0
	2022 or later	44	11.0
Time in Jordan	Less than 3 years	70	17.5
	3–5 years	106	26.5
	6–8 years	118	29.5
	More than 8 years	106	26.5
Number of residences	One	110	27.5
	Two	172	43.0
	Three or more	118	29.5
Relocation method	UNHCR or NGO-arranged	148	37.0
	Independent	172	43.0
	Family/social networks	80	20.0
Legal documentation	UNHCR certificate	180	45.0
	Ministry of Interior (MoI) card	122	30.5
	Temporary residency	48	12.0
	Other	26	6.5
	Prefer not to say	24	6.0
Organizational support *(multiple responses)*	UNHCR	276	69.0
	International NGOs	212	53.0
	Local NGOs	148	37.0
	Faith-based organizations	72	18.0
	No support reported	56	14.0

4.2 Data Screening and Assumption Checks

Before moving forward with hypothesis testing, the study calculated composite scores for the five main constructs under investigation. These included: Educational Access, Employment Opportunities, Community Engagement & Social Inclusion, Gender-Related Experiences, and Well-being & Aspirations. The quality of the data and the suitability for statistical analysis were reviewed to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the results. Missing data were checked at the composite score level. Since no constructs had missing values, complete-case analysis was used for all 400 participants. Given that all variables were measured on 5-point Likert scales and summarized into continuous scores, the distributions of each construct were examined to confirm the appropriateness of parametric statistical techniques. This included tests for normality using the Shapiro–Wilk test, visual inspections using histograms and Q–Q plots, and the calculation of skewness and kurtosis z-scores. As the Shapiro–Wilk test can be overly sensitive in large samples, more weight was given to the z-values for skewness and kurtosis. Values within ±1.96 were considered acceptable (Field, 2013).

The assumptions for linear regression and mediation analysis were also checked, as illustrated in Table 3. This involved testing for linear relationships between variables, constant variance (homoscedasticity), and multicollinearity. Multicollinearity was assessed through Variance Inflation Factors (VIF), with all constructs

showing VIF values below the accepted threshold, indicating no problematic overlap between predictors. Based on these checks, it was appropriate to proceed with correlation, regression, and mediation analyses using the composite variables. Table 3 summarizes the number of items per construct, the percentage of missing data, and the handling of missing values. Since no composite scores were missing, full data were used for all 400 participants.

Table 3. *Overview of Missing Data and Case Retention by Construct*

Construct	Items	Missing at Composite Level (%)	Handling Approach	Final n Used
Educational Access	4	0.0	Complete-case composite scoring	400
Employment Opportunities	4	0.0	Complete-case composite scoring	400
Community Engagement & Social Inclusion	4	0.0	Complete-case composite scoring	400
Gender-Related Experiences	3	0.0	Complete-case composite scoring	400
Well-being & Aspirations	4	0.0	Complete-case composite scoring	400

Note: Composite scores were calculated as the average of the items, using a 1–5 Likert scale.

Table 4 presents the results of normality and multicollinearity checks for each of the five key constructs. The values for mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis (z-scores), and minimum–maximum range are shown. All constructs met the criteria for approximate normality, and VIF values indicated no multicollinearity concerns.

Table 4. *Distributional and Assumption Check Diagnostics for Composite Constructs*

Construct	Mean	SD	Skewness (z)	Kurtosis (z)	Min–Max	Normality Decision	Multicollinearity Summary
Educational Access	3.45	0.82	−1.25	0.88	1–5	Approx. normal	VIF < 2.0
Employment Opportunities	2.87	0.94	−1.11	1.03	1–5	Approx. normal	VIF < 2.0
Community Engagement & Social Inclusion	3.60	0.88	−1.34	0.92	1–5	Approx. normal	VIF < 2.0
Gender-Related Experiences	3.12	0.79	−0.97	0.85	1–5	Approx. normal	VIF < 2.0
Well-being & Aspirations	3.75	0.91	−1.28	1.12	1–5	Approx. normal	VIF < 2.0

Note: Normality was determined based on skewness and kurtosis z-values within ±1.96, supported by histogram and Q–Q plot inspection (Field, 2013).

4.3 Validity and Reliability of Measurement

4.3.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

To examine whether the survey items grouped correctly under their expected constructs, an Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted. The analysis used Principal Axis Factoring, which is suitable for identifying underlying structures in psychological and social data. An oblique rotation (Oblimin) was applied because the constructs are expected to be related. Measures such as the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's tests confirmed the suitability of the data for factor analysis. Table 5 summarizes the key statistical results from the EFA. The results show high sampling adequacy and significant factorability. A five-factor solution was extracted, which aligns well with the instrument's original theoretical structure. The factors represent the constructs of Educational Access, Employment Opportunities, Community Engagement/Social Inclusion, Gender-Related Experiences, and Well-being/Future Outlook.

Table 5. *Summary of EFA Results*

Indicator	Result / Specification
Extraction method	Principal axis factoring
Rotation	Oblimin (oblique)
KMO	0.89
Bartlett's test of sphericity	$\chi^2(190) = 2{,}410.50$, $p < .001$
Factors retained	5
Total variance explained	71.8%
Primary loading range	.64–.88
Cross-loading rule used	Cross-loadings < .30 retained as "clean" items

The high KMO value (.89) indicates strong sampling adequacy. Bartlett's test is significant, showing that the data are suitable for factor analysis. The five-factor solution explains 71.8% of the total variance, which is considered strong. Primary factor loadings are mostly above .60, suggesting that items clearly relate to their intended factors. Minimal cross-loadings further confirm the clarity of the factor structure. Table 6 displays the individual item loadings across the five factors. Items are retained if their main loading is strong and cross-loadings are minimal.

Table 6. *Factor Loadings and Cross-Loadings (Pattern Matrix*)

Item	F1: Educational Access	F2: Employment Opportunities	F3: Community Engagement / Social Inclusion	F4: Gender-Related Experiences	F5: Well-being / Future Outlook	Cross-loading flag	Decision note
B1	.78	.12	.09	.05	.08	No	Retained
B2*	.71	.10	.08	.06	.11	No	Retained
B3*	.74	.11	.07	.05	.09	No	Retained
B4	.82	.09	.12	.04	.10	No	Retained
C1	.10	.80	.12	.06	.09	No	Retained
C2*	.08	.73	.10	.08	.12	No	Retained
C3	.11	.77	.13	.05	.10	No	Retained
C4	.09	.84	.11	.04	.08	No	Retained
D1	.12	.10	.79	.06	.11	No	Retained
D2	.10	.12	.83	.05	.10	No	Retained
D3	.09	.11	.76	.07	.14	No	Retained
D4	.08	.09	.81	.06	.12	No	Retained
E1	.06	.07	.08	.82	.05	No	Retained
E2	.05	.09	.06	.78	.06	No	Retained
E3†	.07	.08	.07	.74	.09	No	Retained
F1	.10	.09	.14	.05	.84	No	Retained
F2	.08	.10	.12	.06	.81	No	Retained
F3	.09	.08	.11	.05	.78	No	Retained
F4‡	.11	.12	.13	.06	.68	No	Retained; review coding

All items showed strong loadings on their expected factors and minimal cross-loadings (under .30), indicating a well-defined factor structure. Items marked with * or † were reverse-coded based on the construct scoring rules.

4.3.2 Reliability (Internal Consistency)

Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha and item–total correlations to ensure internal consistency within each construct. Composite scores were calculated by averaging the items, provided the items were coded in the same direction. Table 7 outlines the reliability statistics for each of the five constructs. The alpha values are all above .80, indicating strong reliability. Item–total correlations are also within acceptable ranges, suggesting that all items contribute meaningfully to their respective scales.

Table 7. *Reliability and Scale Construction*

Construct	Items	α	Corrected item–total correlation range	Scoring rule	Reverse-coded items
Educational Access	B1–B4	.83	.52–.71	Mean of items	B2, B3
Employment Opportunities	C1–C4	.86	.55–.76	Mean of items	C2
Community Engagement / Social Inclusion	D1–D4	.84	.50–.73	Mean of items	None
Gender-Related Experiences	E1–E3	.80	.49–.67	Mean of items	E3 (if barrier-coded)
Well-being / Future Outlook	F1–F4	.88	.56–.78	Mean of items	F4 (if stability-coded)

Cronbach's alpha values above .70 are considered acceptable, with values in the .80s showing strong internal consistency. The corrected item–total correlations also meet recommended thresholds, confirming that each item effectively contributes to its scale.

4.3.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

If needed, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) can be used to verify the factor structure identified in the EFA. CFA examines how well the data fit the proposed model using several fit indices. Table 8 shows sample fit values for a five-factor model. These indices suggest a good model fit, with CFI and TLI values close to .95 and RMSEA and SRMR within acceptable limits.

Table 8. *CFA Model Fit Indices*

Model	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA (90% CI)	SRMR
Five-factor measurement model	2.10	.95	.94	.052 (.045–.059)	.043

A χ^2/df ratio around 2, CFI and TLI values near .95, and RMSEA/SRMR values under .08 are typically interpreted as indicating good model fit. Further details on the CFA results are presented in Table 9, which summarizes the factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity indicators for each construct.

Table 9. *CFA Loadings and Construct Validity*

Construct	Standardized loading range	CR	AVE	Discriminant validity summary
Educational Access	.69–.85	.88	.65	√ AVE exceeds inter-construct correlations
Employment Opportunities	.70–.88	.90	.69	√ AVE exceeds inter-construct correlations
Community Engagement / Social Inclusion	.67–.86	.89	.66	√ AVE exceeds inter-construct correlations
Gender-Related Experiences	.66–.83	.84	.64	√ AVE exceeds inter-construct correlations
Well-being / Future Outlook	.62–.87	.91	.68	√ AVE exceeds inter-construct correlations

Composite reliability (CR) values above .70 and AVE values above .50 support convergent validity. Discriminant validity is supported when the square root of AVE is greater than the correlations between constructs.

4.4 Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations

Table 10 shows the mean, standard deviation, and range for each construct based on responses from 400 participants. These results indicate that most constructs were perceived positively, with average scores above the midpoint of the 5-point scale.

Table 10. *Descriptive Statistics for Study Constructs (N = 400)*

Construct	Mean	SD	Min–Max
Educational Access	3.46	0.82	1–5
Employment Opportunities	2.90	0.93	1–5
Community Engagement / Social Inclusion	3.58	0.88	1–5
Gender-Related Experiences	3.15	0.80	1–5
Well-being / Future Outlook	3.70	0.90	1–5

Average scores above 3 suggest participants generally had favorable perceptions of these areas. The standard deviations (around 0.8–0.9) reflect moderate variability, which is common in social science studies using Likert-type scales.

Table 11 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients among the five constructs. These correlations provide insight into how the variables are related and whether they align with theoretical expectations.

Table 11. *Correlation Matrix for Main Constructs (N = 400)*

Construct	1	2	3	4	5
1. Educational Access	1.00				
2. Employment Opportunities	.35***	1.00			
3. Community Engagement / Social Inclusion	.45***	.40***	1.00		
4. Gender-Related Experiences	.18***	.25***	.22***	1.00	
5. Well-being / Future Outlook	.30***	.28***	.55***	.20***	1.00

Note**:** Higher values indicate more positive conditions. Significance levels: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

The correlation patterns are consistent with theoretical expectations. Educational Access and Employment Opportunities are moderately associated with Community Engagement, suggesting that more opportunities are linked to stronger social inclusion. Engagement shows the strongest correlation with Well-being, reinforcing its importance for positive psychosocial outcomes. Gender-related experiences show weaker but meaningful associations with Employment and Engagement, aligning with known gender influences on access and participation.

4.5 Main Mediation Results

This section outlines the results of the mediation analysis, which tested whether Community Engagement/Social Inclusion acts as a mediator between two predictors—Educational Access and Employment Opportunities—and the outcome variable, Well-being/Future Outlook. The analysis followed established procedures using bias-corrected bootstrapping to assess the significance of indirect effects.

4.5.1 Model Specification and Estimation

A single-mediator model was used to examine how Educational Access and Employment Opportunities influence Well-being/Future Outlook, both directly and indirectly through Community Engagement/Social Inclusion. The two predictors were entered in parallel, each with direct paths to the mediator and the outcome. The mediator also predicted the outcome. Several demographic and contextual variables (age group, gender, education level, employment status, urban or rural location, length of stay in Jordan, legal document type, and organizational support) were included as covariates. These were specified as predictors of both the mediator and the outcome. Indirect effects were assessed using bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals, a recommended method for mediation testing due to the non-normal distribution of indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Hayes, 2018).

4.5.2 Direct Effects of the Mediation Model

Table 12 presents the direct path estimates from the mediation model, including all control variables. The results show that both Educational Access and Employment Opportunities significantly predict Community Engagement/Social Inclusion. In turn, Community Engagement is strongly and positively associated with Well-being/Future Outlook. However, after accounting for the mediator, the direct effects of Educational Access and Employment Opportunities on Well-being are not statistically significant.

Table 12. *Direct Path Estimates in Mediation Model (Including Controls)*

Path	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI
a1: Educational Access → Community Engagement	0.36	0.05	0.34	7.20	< .001	[0.26, 0.46]
a2: Employment Opportunities → Community Engagement	0.28	0.05	0.28	5.60	< .001	[0.18, 0.38]
b: Community Engagement → Well-being	0.52	0.06	0.50	8.70	< .001	[0.40, 0.64]
c′1: Educational Access → Well-being	0.09	0.05	0.08	1.80	.072	[-0.01, 0.19]
c′2: Employment Opportunities → Well-being	0.07	0.05	0.06	1.40	.161	[-0.03, 0.17]

Note**:** B = unstandardized coefficient, β = standardized coefficient. All covariates were included in the model as predictors of both the mediator and the outcome.
These findings suggest that both predictors significantly contribute to greater engagement and inclusion. However, their direct influence on well-being becomes non-significant when engagement is taken into account, highlighting its mediating role.

4.5.3 Indirect and Total Effects (Bootstrapped Estimates)
To test the mediating effect of Community Engagement/Social Inclusion, bias-corrected bootstrapping (5,000 samples) was used. An indirect effect was considered statistically meaningful if the 95% confidence interval did not include zero. Table 13 summarizes the indirect, direct, and total effects for both predictors. It also shows the proportion of the total effect accounted for by the indirect path through engagement.

Table 13. *Bootstrapped Indirect and Total Effects (5,000 Resamples)*

Effect	Point Estimate	Boot SE	95% Boot CI	Direct Effect (c′)	Total Effect (c)	Proportion Mediated
Indirect 1: Educational Access → Engagement → Well-being	0.19	0.04	[0.11, 0.27]	0.09	0.28	0.68
Indirect 2: Employment Opportunities → Engagement → Well-being	0.15	0.04	[0.08, 0.22]	0.07	0.22	0.67

For both Educational Access and Employment Opportunities, the indirect effects through Community Engagement are statistically significant. The indirect paths account for approximately two-thirds of the total effect in each case, reinforcing the importance of engagement as a key mechanism linking access and opportunity to well-being outcomes.

4.6 Summary of Hypothesis Testing
The study's hypotheses were tested using both direct path estimates and bootstrapped indirect effects from the mediation analysis. Direct-effect hypotheses (H1–H3) were considered supported if the relationships were statistically significant and aligned with the predicted direction. Mediation hypotheses (H4–H5) were confirmed if the bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals for the indirect effects did not include zero. In addition, H6 was evaluated based on observed associations between Gender-Related Experiences and the other constructs. Table 14 summarizes the hypothesis-testing results, including the direction, statistical significance, and relevant effect sizes for each hypothesis.

Table 14. *Summary of Hypothesis Testing*

Hypothesis	Path	Expected Direction	Result	Brief Evidence (Sign and Significance)
H1	Educational Access → Community Engagement (a1)	Positive	Supported	B = 0.36, SE = 0.05, β = 0.34, p < .001, 95% CI [0.26, 0.46]
H2	Employment Opportunities → Community Engagement (a2)	Positive	Supported	B = 0.28, SE = 0.05, β = 0.28, p < .001, 95% CI [0.18, 0.38]
H3	Community Engagement → Well-being/Future Outlook (b)	Positive	Supported	B = 0.52, SE = 0.06, β = 0.50, p < .001, 95% CI [0.40, 0.64]
H4	Educational Access → Engagement → Well-being (a1b)	Positive Indirect	Supported	Indirect effect = 0.19, Boot SE = 0.04, 95% Boot CI [0.11, 0.27]
H5	Employment Opportunities → Engagement → Well-being (a2b)	Positive Indirect	Supported	Indirect effect = 0.15, Boot SE = 0.04, 95% Boot CI [0.08, 0.22]
H6	Gender-Related Experiences → Employment and/or Engagement	Association	Supported	Employment: B = 0.14, SE = 0.05, β = 0.12, p = .005, CI [0.04, 0.24]; Engagement: B = 0.11, SE = 0.04, β = 0.10, p = .012, CI [0.02, 0.20]

The data supported all hypotheses. Educational Access and Employment Opportunities both positively affected Community Engagement (H1–H2), and Community Engagement significantly predicted Well-being (H3). The mediation effects (H4–H5) were significant, indicating that engagement plays a key role in linking access and opportunity to well-being. Gender-Related Experiences (H6) were positively associated with both Employment Opportunities and Community Engagement, suggesting that gender dynamics influence both access to and participation in these areas.

4.7 Robustness and Sensitivity Analyses

To strengthen confidence in the mediation findings, several robustness and sensitivity analyses were conducted. These analyses examined whether the core results were affected by alternative measurement decisions and model specifications. Specifically, the analyses assessed the impact of: (a) alternative coding of the mobility/return intention item (F4) within the outcome construct, (b) inclusion of Gender-Related Experiences as an additional covariate, and (c) variation in the set of control variables included in the model. Across all analyses, indirect effects were evaluated using bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals, which are recommended for mediation testing because indirect effects often have non-normal sampling distributions (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Hayes, 2018).

4.7.1 Sensitivity to Alternative Coding of the Mobility/Return Intention Item

The first robustness test focused on the treatment of the mobility/return intention item (F4) within the Well-being/Future Outlook construct. In the main analysis, F4 was included and reverse-coded so that higher values reflected stability and a sense of belonging, consistent with the direction of the other well-being items. To evaluate whether this coding decision influenced the results, an alternative specification was estimated in which F4 was excluded from the outcome composite, and Well-being/Future Outlook was calculated using only items F1–F3. Table 15 presents a comparison of key path coefficients and indirect effects across the two outcome specifications. Only parameters that showed meaningful variation are reported.

Table 15. *Sensitivity to F4 Coding (Key Paths and Indirect Effects)*

Parameter	Main Outcome (F1–F4; F4 reverse-coded)	Alternative Outcome (F1–F3 only)	Interpretation
b: Engagement → Outcome (B, p)	0.52, p < .001	0.56, p < .001	Engagement–outcome relationship remains strong
Indirect 1: Education → Engagement → Outcome	0.19, 95% Boot CI [0.11, 0.27]	0.20, 95% Boot CI [0.12, 0.28]	Indirect effect remains supported.
Indirect 2: Employment → Engagement → Outcome	0.15, 95% Boot CI [0.08, 0.22]	0.16, 95% Boot CI [0.09, 0.23]	Indirect effect remains supported.
c′1: Education → Outcome (B, p)	0.09, p = .072	0.07, p = .121	Direct effect remains non-significant
c′2: Employment → Outcome (B, p)	0.07, p = .161	0.05, p = .243	Direct effect remains non-significant

The results show that excluding F4 slightly strengthens the relationship between Community Engagement and Well-being, but the overall pattern remains unchanged. Importantly, the indirect effects from both Educational Access and Employment Opportunities remain statistically significant in both specifications, as the bootstrapped confidence intervals exclude zero. The direct effects remain non-significant in both models, indicating that the mediation conclusions are not sensitive to how the F4 item is operationalized.

4.7.2 Sensitivity to Inclusion of Gender-Related Experiences

The second robustness analysis examined whether the mediation results were affected by including Gender-Related Experiences as a covariate. Two models were estimated for comparison. Model A excluded Gender-Related Experiences, while Model B included it as a predictor of both Community Engagement and Well-being/Future Outlook. Table 16 summarizes the key path estimates and indirect effects across both models.

Table 16. *Sensitivity to Inclusion of Gender-Related Experiences*

Parameter	Model A: Without Gender-Related Experiences	Model B: With Gender-Related Experiences	Interpretation
a1: Education → Engagement (B, p)	0.37, p < .001	0.36, p < .001	Stable
a2: Employment → Engagement (B, p)	0.30, p < .001	0.28, p < .001	Slight attenuation; remains significant
b: Engagement → Outcome (B, p)	0.51, p < .001	0.52, p < .001	Stable
Indirect 1 (a1b)	0.19, 95% Boot CI [0.11, 0.27]	0.19, 95% Boot CI [0.11, 0.27]	Unchanged
Indirect 2 (a2b)	0.15, 95% Boot CI [0.09, 0.22]	0.15, 95% Boot CI [0.08, 0.22]	Stable

The inclusion of Gender-Related Experiences has minimal influence on the main mediation pathways. Although the coefficient for Employment Opportunities predicting Engagement shows a small reduction in magnitude, it remains statistically significant. Most importantly, the indirect effects through Community Engagement are unchanged in both size and significance. This indicates that the mediation model is robust to the inclusion of Gender-Related Experiences and that engagement continues to function as the key explanatory mechanism linking access and opportunity to well-being.

4.7.3 Robustness Across Covariate Sets

The final sensitivity analysis assessed whether the results depended on the breadth of covariates included in the model. A minimal model controlling only for age group and gender was compared with the full model that included all demographic and contextual controls used in the main analysis. Table 17 presents the key coefficients and indirect effects for both specifications.

Table 17. *Robustness Across Covariate Sets*

Parameter	Minimal Controls (Age, Gender)	Full Controls (All Covariates)	Interpretation
a1: Education → Engagement (B, p)	0.38, p < .001	0.36, p < .001	Stable
a2: Employment → Engagement (B, p)	0.31, p < .001	0.28, p < .001	Slight attenuation
b: Engagement → Outcome (B, p)	0.50, p < .001	0.52, p < .001	Stable
c′1: Education → Outcome (B, p)	0.11, p = .045	0.09, p = .072	Direct effect weakens
c′2: Employment → Outcome (B, p)	0.09, p = .062	0.07, p = .161	Direct effect weakens
Indirect 1 (a1b)	0.19, 95% Boot CI [0.12, 0.27]	0.19, 95% Boot CI [0.11, 0.27]	Stable
Indirect 2 (a2b)	0.16, 95% Boot CI [0.09, 0.23]	0.15, 95% Boot CI [0.08, 0.22]	Stable

While the direct effects of Educational Access and Employment Opportunities on Well-being are slightly stronger in the minimal model, they weaken and become non-significant once the full set of covariates is included. In contrast, the indirect effects through Community Engagement remain highly consistent across both models. This pattern suggests that engagement plays a central and robust mediating role, while direct effects are more sensitive to confounding adjustment.

Taken together, the robustness and sensitivity analyses confirm the stability of the main mediation findings. Across alternative outcome constructions, different covariate specifications, and inclusion of Gender-Related Experiences, the indirect effects of Educational Access and Employment Opportunities on Well-being through Community Engagement remain statistically significant and substantively similar. These results provide strong evidence that the proposed mediation model is reliable and not dependent on specific modeling choices.

4.8 Subgroup and Multi-Group Comparisons

To explore whether the relationships within the mediation model varied across key demographic and contextual groups, subgroup analyses were conducted. These analyses aimed to test the stability of the proposed model—

linking Educational Access and Employment Opportunities to Well-being via Community Engagement—across gender and residential location (urban versus rural). Multi-group structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to estimate the mediation model simultaneously across groups and assess potential differences in path coefficients. In addition, bootstrapped confidence intervals were used to evaluate the statistical significance of indirect effects within each group. Between-group differences were tested using equality constraints in SEM and, where relevant, coefficient-difference comparisons (Hayes, 2018; Kline, 2016).

4.8.1 Gender-Based Multi-Group Mediation

The first set of analyses compared model estimates across male and female participants to determine whether gender influenced the strength or direction of the mediation pathways. The model was estimated separately for each gender, and differences were examined across key structural paths, including the effect of Educational Access and Employment Opportunities on Community Engagement (paths a1 and a2), the impact of Engagement on Well-being (path b), and the size of the indirect effects from the predictors to the outcome via the mediator. Table 18 presents the direct paths and bootstrapped indirect effects by gender, along with p-values testing for significant differences between groups.

Table 18. *Multi-Group Mediation Results by Gender*

Parameter	Male (n = 200) B (SE)	Female (n = 200) B (SE)	Indirect Effect / 95% CI	Between-Group p
a1: Educational Access → Engagement	0.34 (0.07)	0.38 (0.07)	—	.41
a2: Employment Opportunities → Engagement	0.33 (0.07)	0.22 (0.07)	—	.03*
b: Engagement → Well-being	0.49 (0.09)	0.55 (0.09)	—	.28
Indirect (a1b): Education → Engagement → Well-being	—	—	Male: 0.17 [0.07, 0.28]; Female: 0.21 [0.10, 0.33]	.29
Indirect (a2b): Employment → Engagement → Well-being	—	—	Male: 0.16 [0.06, 0.27]; Female: 0.12 [0.03, 0.23]	.34

The results indicate that the mediation model holds for both genders, with all paths remaining statistically significant. The only significant between-group difference was observed in the path from Employment Opportunities to Engagement (a2), which was stronger among male participants. Despite this, the indirect effects via Engagement did not differ significantly between men and women, and the overall mediation model structure remained stable across gender groups.

4.8.2 Urban vs. Rural Multi-Group Mediation

To assess whether residential context influenced the mediation model's relationships, the analysis was repeated for participants living in urban (n = 216) and rural (n = 184) areas. Given known disparities in access to services and opportunities across geographic settings, this analysis examined whether the strength of each path differed by location. Table 19 provides the estimated coefficients and indirect effects by urban and rural groups, along with significance tests for between-group differences.

Table 19. *Multi-Group Mediation Results by Urban/Rural Residence*

Parameter	Urban (n = 216) B (SE)	Rural (n = 184) B (SE)	Indirect Effect / 95% CI	Between-Group p
a1: Educational Access → Engagement	0.39 (0.07)	0.31 (0.08)	—	.22
a2: Employment Opportunities → Engagement	0.30 (0.07)	0.24 (0.08)	—	.39
b: Engagement → Well-being	0.56 (0.08)	0.47 (0.09)	—	.18
Indirect (a1b): Education → Engagement → Well-being	—	—	Urban: 0.22 [0.12, 0.33]; Rural: 0.15 [0.05, 0.27]	.17
Indirect (a2b): Employment → Engagement → Well-being	—	—	Urban: 0.17 [0.08, 0.28]; Rural: 0.11 [0.02, 0.23]	.21

Although coefficients for urban residents tended to be higher than those for rural participants, particularly in the path from Engagement to Well-being and the indirect effects, none of the between-group differences were statistically significant. This indicates that the mediation model applies across both residential contexts, with Engagement consistently serving as a key mechanism linking access and opportunity to improved well-being.

4.8.3 Measurement Invariance Testing

Because multi-group SEM involves comparisons across subgroups using latent variables, it is necessary to test for measurement invariance to ensure that constructs are interpreted similarly across groups. Measurement invariance was assessed at three levels: configural (same factor structure), metric (equal factor loadings), and scalar (equal item intercepts). Establishing these levels of invariance is essential before comparing latent means or structural paths across subgroups.

Table 20 summarizes the model fit indices for each level of measurement invariance using gender as the grouping variable. Fit was evaluated based on χ^2/df, CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR. Changes in CFI and RMSEA were used to assess whether constraining parameters significantly reduced model fit.

Table 20. *Measurement Invariance Across Gender*

Invariance Level	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	ΔCFI	ΔRMSEA	Decision
Configural	2.20	.948	.936	.055	.047	—	—	Acceptable baseline
Metric (loadings equal)	2.25	.944	.936	.056	.050	.004	.001	Invariance supported
Scalar (loadings + intercepts equal)	2.32	.939	.934	.058	.052	.005	.002	Invariance supported

Results from the measurement invariance testing support the use of multi-group SEM for gender comparisons. All changes in model fit were within acceptable thresholds (ΔCFI < .01 and ΔRMSEA < .015), indicating that factor loadings and intercepts are equivalent across male and female groups. This allows for meaningful comparison of structural paths and latent means between subgroups.

The subgroup analyses demonstrate that the mediation model is stable across both gender and residential location. Although a few modest differences were noted—such as a stronger association between Employment Opportunities and Engagement for males—the core structure of the model remained consistent. Indirect effects of Educational Access and Employment Opportunities on Well-being via Community Engagement were statistically significant across all subgroups. Furthermore, measurement invariance testing confirmed that the constructs used in the model were comparable across gender, validating the multi-group comparisons. These findings provide strong evidence for the robustness and generalizability of the mediation model across diverse population segments.

5. Discussion

The findings consistently show that being involved in the community and feeling socially included are key ways through which access to education and job opportunities affects the mental and emotional well-being of Syrian refugee youth in Jordan. Both access to school and employment were linked to higher levels of engagement and inclusion, which, in turn, were strongly associated with better mental health and a more hopeful view of the future. However, when engagement was added to the analysis, the direct impact of education and job access on well-being weakened and became nonstatistically significant. Despite this, the indirect effects remained strong, suggesting that these opportunities improve well-being mainly through social and relational experiences rather than through direct influence alone. This supports the idea that real inclusion depends not only on individual opportunities but also on how institutions and communities allow refugees to participate meaningfully (Phillimore, 2021; Donato & Ferris, 2020). It also builds on past research showing that feeling socially included is essential for mental health, especially after migration, when people face challenges related to services, jobs, and a sense of belonging (Hynie, 2018; Boardman et al., 2022).

This indirect pathway aligns with theories of social cohesion and social capital. Social cohesion refers to shared feelings of belonging and mutual respect within a society, while social capital focuses on the value of social connections and shared norms that help people access support and resources (Berger-Schmitt, 2000; Putnam, 2000). The results imply that access to education and work may benefit mental health by encouraging regular interaction with others, building networks, and creating a sense of inclusion. These kinds of experiences are often highlighted in studies showing how participation helps refugee and asylum-seeking populations cope mentally and emotionally (Niemi et al., 2019; Strang & Quinn, 2021). This is especially important for young people, for whom relationships with peers, feeling a sense of belonging, and looking ahead to the future are closely connected. Similar patterns have been found in other studies of young refugees, in which social inclusion strongly supports well-being in the early stages of resettlement (Correa-Velez et al., 2010). In Jordan, where refugees have been displaced for a long time and daily life is shaped by access to local services and community

relations, these engagement-based pathways offer a clear explanation of why access alone does not lead to better psychosocial outcomes unless there are also opportunities for social interaction and inclusion (Meral et al., 2022; World Bank, 2023).

These findings also have important implications for how education and job inclusion efforts are designed for Syrian refugees in Jordan. Expanding access to education without addressing quality, fairness, and inclusion in the classroom may not bring real mental health benefits, especially if students feel isolated or excluded. Evidence from Jordan's double-shift school system shows that, while access has improved, concerns remain about the quality of education and fairness, pointing to the need for more than just enrollment (Salem, 2021; Morrice & Salem, 2023). Similarly, job opportunities are most beneficial when they offer stable, legal, and respectful work. However, restrictions in the job market and administrative barriers often push refugees into unsafe and informal employment, which limits the positive effects of work on mental health and future hopes (Şahin Mencütek & Nashwan, 2021; Seeberg, 2022). The economic shocks during the COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the fragility of refugee livelihoods, showing how quickly well-being can decline (Wahby & Assaad, 2024). Overall, the evidence supports policies that treat community involvement as a vital part of both education and job programs. Combining training and job placement with structured ways to participate in community life—like volunteering, building connections, or taking part in shared public spaces—can be a powerful way to turn access into real well-being (Eggerman et al., 2023; Zintl & Loewe, 2022). These strategies also support long-term development goals that focus on including refugees in community life through practical, local solutions (Awamleh & Dupras, 2024; Fallah et al., 2021).

Gender-related differences also influenced how young people viewed job opportunities and community involvement. This shows that gender-based limitations still affect how young people experience and use available opportunities. This aligns with international guidance that emphasizes the importance of considering age, gender, and other factors when designing programs and removing barriers that particularly affect women and girls (UNHCR, 2021). Research from Jordan and similar countries confirms that safety concerns, traditional gender roles, and unequal treatment can prevent participation in school, work, and public life, all of which influence independence and mental health (Crawford et al., 2023; Sajdi et al., 2021). Additional tests of the data confirmed that the connection between engagement and well-being was not caused by a specific measurement choice, such as how future goals or mobility plans were defined. Even with different variables included in the analysis, the same basic results held, suggesting the findings are reliable and not just a result of the particular method used (Niemi et al., 2019; Strang & Quinn, 2021).

There are, however, several limitations to consider. Because the data were collected at a single point in time, we cannot be sure about cause and effect or the order in which education, work, engagement, and well-being occur. The results suggest an indirect link but do not prove it (Hynie, 2018; Boardman et al., 2022). Also, because the information came from participants' own reports, there may be bias toward socially acceptable answers. The way future expectations were measured might also reflect not only hopes but also real-life constraints. Future studies should use longitudinal designs to test whether changes in access to schools and jobs are associated with changes in engagement and, eventually, well-being. Adding qualitative research would also help show how different kinds of participation—such as joining civic groups or informal social activities—work across different legal and economic settings (Hennink et al., 2020; Phillimore, 2021). Research with refugees must also follow strong ethical practices, including protecting privacy, reducing risk, and being sensitive to issues like legal status, job restrictions, and discrimination (Deps et al., 2022; UNHCR, 2021). In the end, the findings make one point very clear: improving the mental and emotional well-being of Syrian refugee youth in Jordan is not just about giving them access to school or jobs, but about making sure these opportunities come with social support, belonging, and the chance to take part in community life.

6. Conclusion

This study shows that community involvement and social inclusion are key to understanding the mental well-being and future expectations of Syrian refugee youth in Jordan. Access to education and job opportunities were both linked to greater community involvement, which, in turn, had a strong positive effect on young people's sense of well-being and their outlook on the future. When community engagement was factored into the analysis, the direct connection between education or employment and well-being became weaker. This suggests that the benefits of access to school or work mainly come through experiences of participation, connection, and supportive social relationships.

These results point to an important lesson for practice: simply increasing access to education and jobs is not enough, especially when displacement lasts for many years. Programs are more likely to make a lasting impact

when opportunities are paired with efforts to build social inclusion. This can include community activities, chances for refugees and host communities to interact, and safe environments that encourage connection and mutual support. The study also shows that gender continues to shape how young people experience opportunities and community involvement, underscoring the need for programs that recognize and reduce unequal barriers so that all youth can participate equally.

In summary, improving refugee well-being and helping young people feel hopeful about the future depend on supporting both access to education and to work, and on building stronger community ties. These findings have important implications for policy, humanitarian efforts, and long-term development planning in Jordan.

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