Extended Abstract

Active Aging Experiences of Turkish Immigrants in Netherlands*

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Abstract
The aim of this study is to evaluate with a focus on the theme of active aging process of Turks who have migrated to the Netherlands at a young age and are still living and aging there. In addition to the social sciences literature, the study also uses reports from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the European Union (EU), and the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) and conducted a qualitative study in the Netherlands for three weeks. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in the field study through contact made with NGOs and governmental agencies. Rather than focusing on economics, the study emphasizes the dimensions of individual and society. The collected data have been analyzed under the headings of social support, active pursuits, and life satisfaction. The field study has been conducted with a group of 40 people composed of healthy, retired Turkish individuals who are first generation immigrants and have aged in the Netherlands. The study concludes that elderly people experience an active-aging process within the framework of culture.

Keywords
First-generation elderly migrants • Aging out of place of origin • Labor migration • Active aging • Life satisfaction of the elderly • Social support among the elderly

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This study evaluates the aging experiences of Turkish “first-generation” (Gijsberts & Dagevos, 2010, p. 35, 36) “labor migrants” (Warnes & Williams, 2006, p. 1263) who have aged in the Netherlands. Because ethnicity has an extensive impact on the aging experience (Carr, Biggs, & Kimberley, 2013, p. 27), there is a distinction between aging in place of origin and aging out of place of origin (Jackson, 2002, p. 825).

There is no consensus on the definition of active aging (Gauthier & Smeeding, 2003, p. 279). Activity theory, which matches activity with life satisfaction, is inconclusive (Hooymans, Kawamoto, & Kiyak, 2015, p. 147). This theory has been criticized for generalizing the aging process by homogenizing the elderly who are faced with biological, economic, and political obstacles. However, the theory’s empiric link between activity and subjective well-being is considered to be accurate and viable (Walker, 2006, p. 83). This study discusses active aging with sensitivity to traditional culture and emphasizes non-economic aspects.

In the study, particular emphasis has been put on pursuits that contribute to subjective well-being. Being an official member is not considered to be a requirement for these activities. In this context; sports, social, cultural, educational, and indoor or outdoor leisure-time activities like grandchild care, voluntary work, religious acts, and walking are all considered active pursuits.

The term “life satisfaction” discusses financial conditions, health issues, and social resources as a whole, thus refraining from a reductive, age-blind approach (Higgs, Hyde, Wiggins, & Blane, 2003, pp. 241–243). Social support for the elderly that is provided through their social networks has been examined in the context of social interaction (Wu & Hart, 2002, pp. 392–395).

Although the general literature on aging as an immigrant is extensive, Turkish studies have been inadequate. By discussing both theory and research, this study intends to contribute to the relevant literature in Turkey.

**Methodology**

The study uses the phenomenological research design. The required characteristics (being: a retiree, healthy, self-sufficient, able to go outdoors and get together with people, and an immigrant to the Netherlands at a young age) of the field study group were determined through theoretical research. After five pilot interviews, 40 people were included in field study group. The problem-centered interview was chosen as the data collection technique, and a semi-structured questionnaire was used in the interviews. Audio recordings of the collected data were transcribed for systematic interpretation (Mayring, 2011, p. 93) and descriptive analysis (Kümbetoğlu, 2012, p. 154). After determining the themes and scripts, systematic analysis was performed.
by defining the correlation between themes and scripts (Kümbetoğlu, 2012, p. 154; Mayring, 2011, p. 103). After analyzing the data, comments were made according to the relevant literature on sociology.

One of the limitations of the study is that there is no control group. Secondly, only cross-sectional data has been collected. Thirdly, the field study group is homogenous and does not represent a majority. Finally, interviews took less time than expected.

Findings

The rates of social support received from children (21 of the 27 participants in need) and neighbors (33 out of 35) are high. However, not enough data was found for the characteristics of these types of social support.

The major of participants’ areas of social contact are neighbors, mosques, and associations. Four participants look for alternative places, and only three people suffer from loneliness. The majority (33 participants) find their social contact to be sufficient. Social contact with children is high (once a week for 35 participants). Contact with foreign individuals is limited to neighborhood relations.

The majority of participants (37) regularly perform programs that help their subjective well-being and enable social participation while spending time at indoor and outdoor activities.

For social adaptation, themes were evaluated within the scope of SCP and the social sciences literature: fluency in Dutch (Gijsberts & Dagevos, 2010, p. 7), recycling (Hoff & Vrooman, 2011, p. 91), relations with foreigner neighbors, perception of district housing, and thoughts on returning to Turkey permanently. Participants have been having difficulties adapting to the Netherlands.

Religious acts, educational activities, reading, gardening, sports, and grandchild care are some of their active pursuits. While discussing participation in volunteer activities, the studies of Bradley (2000) and Miranda (2011) were used. The current study’s headings are: nursing elderly/poor people in the neighborhood (27 participants), voluntary work in mosques (21 participants), providing financial assistance to mosques (all of the participants), volunteer work in an association (4 participants), educating neighbors (2 participants), caring for orphan children (1 participant). Fifteen participants have health problems that prevent or limit their participation in volunteer works.

Participants’ life satisfaction has been evaluated under five categories: residence conditions (all satisfied), health (17 satisfied), inter-family relations (24 satisfied), new social roles and statutes (24 satisfied), and being an immigrant (19 satisfied). Twenty-
three participants are satisfied with life as a whole, while 17 are not. By inter-relating these categories, three major reasons have been determined that lower life satisfaction: being an immigrant, health problems, and inadequate new roles and status.

**Discussion**

According to the study’s findings, Turkish elders experience an active aging process in the framework of traditional culture. On the other hand, life satisfaction is relatively low.

Possible political steps for increasing life satisfaction have been categorized into three groups: replacing the dissatisfaction of being an immigrant, facilitating handling health problems, and providing enough active opportunities to pursue. These categories are not autonomous. The main priority in all political efforts should be to create programs that overcome the problem of fluency in Dutch. The current “Only Dutch” perspective of the government poses a major obstacle.

The first area of political practice is volunteer work. Having enough active pursuits increases life satisfaction (Walker, 2006, p. 83). Experiences related to volunteer work are influenced by personal interests, health, time, and transportation (Bradley, 2000, p. 46). Turkish elders do not have enough opportunities to participate in volunteer work.

The second political area is about increasing social participation, which requires a multi-dimensional study. Turkish elders spend their leisure time in the neighborhood-mosque-association triangle. Aside from their neighborly relationships, they do not meet up with other social groups. In order to create new social spaces for the elderly, district housing that provides interactions in outdoor leisure time might be an alternative. Governments should also encourage establishing collective and multilingual associations and NGOs.

Although participants are self-sufficient, most of them have health problems. Nursing centers for the elderly should enhance their sensitivity to Turkish traditions. The number of houses for those 55 and older that belong to Turkish elders should also increase. An insurance agreement for the elderly should be signed between Turkey and the Netherlands to solve the problem of returning for those with health issues. Another obstacle for returning to Turkey is that their children and grandchildren live in the Netherlands. Inter-family relations play a crucial role in life satisfaction.

Because mosques provide social participation, mosques in Turkey can be a space for elderly people to acquire active pursuits.

Aging as an immigrant results with problems of social belonging. The Turkish elderly believe that both Turkish and Dutch communities marginalize them. They expect the Turkish government to establish a ministry for Turks living abroad.
Conclusion

Modern approaches ignore the Turkish elderly’s volunteer activities as they have no official membership. However, they gain new social roles by spending their energy efficiently. This study confirms the significance of cultural sensitivity on the theme of active aging.

New projects for the elderly should focus on the following situations: the elderly’s role as mentor for grandchildren, their counseling role in conflicts between children and grandchildren, and their role of cultural transmission to the third generation. The social support they give should be examined within the context of their entire social network. Sibling relations and the impacts of immigration should also be examined. Finally, the elderly’s awareness of their legal rights and responsibilities should also be examined.

Projects should be developed for elderly Turkish labor immigrants. Similar research should also be urgently conducted in France and Germany. A longitudinal and comparative database needs to be organized. The Netherlands was chosen in this study because there are greater developments on active aging there.

Kaynakça/References


