Distinction in Old Age: Challenges Awaiting Local Authorities in Contemporary Turkey

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Abstract
The demographic transition in Turkey indicates that the next one-hundred years will be a century of women and older adults. During this process, the quality and accessibility of services provided by local authorities will affect the welfare of all citizens (including women and older adults). A refined analysis of the various populations will provide local authorities with a chance to gain further insight and understanding in order to revamp social policies and services. Under the scope of this study, older adults’ demographic characteristics, health status and services accessibility, social relations and support mechanisms, “will to live,” participation in cultural activities, and use of the Internet are discussed socially in terms of the intersectionality of income and educational levels. The Antalya Aging Study (AAS), conducted in Antalya in 2013, was a cross-sectional study that consisted of face-to-face interviews with 381 people, 55 years of age and older. Under the AAS, a standard questionnaire consisting of seven modules was implemented over participants selected as representative of Antalya using the random sampling technique. According to findings from the analysis, the majority of the lower classes consist of young seniors (55-69 years). While the percentage of older women from lower classes was found to be 33%, men’s percentage from lower classes was 3%. The findings also show that disease, disability, and psychological problems are more common among lower classes. On the other hand, the will to live among upper classes was higher; they also participated in refined cultural activities and used technology more frequently. The intersectionality of factors such as gender, age, and class have a critical effect on the aging process. Therefore, when local authorities plan services for citizens with a lifelong history of limited opportunities, inequalities must be taken into consideration. One noteworthy conclusion of this study is that while lower classes need direct financial support to improve their social status, middle classes require health and social care services.

Keywords
Class • Cultural capital • Bourdieu • Gender • Intersectionality • Baby boomers

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Within its history of modernization, inequalities in Turkey have been embedded in its social, economic, and cultural policies (Arun, 2012). However, during the last 50 years, the transformation from a welfare state has led to a decentralization and fragmentation of services. Fragmented services are real serious crises in a welfare state (Arun, 2016). During this process, the quality and accessibility of services provided by local authorities affects the welfare of all citizens. Given this background, local governments in Turkey should consider what level they can meet the needs and demands of disadvantaged groups, including women and older adults.

A refined analysis of various populations will provide local authorities with a chance to gain further insights and understanding in order to revamp social policies and services. Under the scope of this study, older adults’ demographic characteristics, health status and services accessibility, social relations, social support mechanisms, “will to live”, participation in cultural activities, and Internet usage are discussed in terms of the intersectionality of income and educational levels.

There are common variables in analyzing inequality research, including class, gender, and ethnicity. None of these variables are any more or less important than the other. Effects produced in some isolated variables do not allow for grasping the social realities of the very heterogeneous segments of society. According to Arun (2015a), analyzing the social elements gained from isolated perspectives produce skewed results. Therefore, evaluations based solely on age, gender, or income alone are insufficient at assessing individuals’ health and disability status. One should note that the intersectionality of all of these factors during the aging process have a critical impact.

The Antalya Aging Study (AAS), conducted in Antalya in 2013, was a cross-sectional study consisting of face-to-face interviews with 381 people, 55 years of age and older. A standard questionnaire consisting of seven modules was implemented with participants selected using the random sampling technique to produce a representative sample of Antalya.

According to participants’ social positions, ten different group typologies were identified. Typologies were obtained based on the intersectionality of education and income levels. Firstly, all participants were positioned on the horizontal axis according to education level. Movement to the right on the horizontal axis indicated an increase in education level, while movement to the left indicated a decrease. The vertical axis separated the participants into income groups. The bottom of the vertical axis indicated no income, while middle-lower, middle, and upper income groups are respectively listed further up the vertical axis. In the chart, individuals who cannot read or write were located on the far left of the horizontal, and individuals with no income, located at the bottom of the vertical axis, come together and are identified as the first of 10 different typologies of social position. The first group, representing the
most fragile, made up 2.4% of participants. The second group (1.8% of participants) consisted of individuals with neither formal education nor income. Elementary school graduates with no income made up the third group (9.2% of respondents).

Age is among the least important factors in Bourdieusian analyses of cultural distinction. Instead of age, Bourdieusian analyses typically address gender in the context of how cultural consumption is performed (i.e., Bihagen & Katz-Gerro, 2000, pp. 327–328; Bryson, 1996; Chan & Goldthorpe, 2005; DiMaggio, 1982; Erickson, 1996; Karademir Hazir, 2014; Katz-Gerro, 1999; Silva, 2006; Skeggs, 2004; van Eijck & van Oosterhout, 2005). Friedman, Savage, Hanquinet, and Miles (2015) discuss the significant role of age and generation in structuring cultural consumption practices. However, studies in Turkey had been carried out previously that posit the centrality of age as a pivotal dimension of social position. Arun (2009) analyzed the distribution of cultural capital for "cultivated citizens" in different age groups and identified distinct forms of cultural consumption practices among a diverse group of both younger and older generations. In this context, individuals obtaining similar amounts of cultural capital among different generations, though representing different age groups, do not simply vary per differential means of acculturation, but through differentiations in consumption practices (e.g., field of health) diversify, and thus share fewer similarities with increases in age. However, Bourdieu differentiated elite- and popular middle-class tastes in the field of education, music, academy art, and other cultural consumption fields. Owners of capital that had similar amounts appreciated relatively homogenous aesthetic dispositions (Bourdieu, 2015).

However, current studies show that age triggers a degree of cultural distinction between individuals with similar amounts of cultural capital (Arun, 2012, 2014). Simply put, cultural capital does not exhibit efficacy in fields of cultural activity. In this context, perceived homogeneity of possessors of voluminous cultural, economic or social capital demonstrated in attitude or behavior is not meaningful in and of itself.

Cultural inequality passed down through the generations (Arun, 2014) is also quite distinctive in organizing everyday life. Cultural inequalities had only been assessed from a vertical perspective previously, but are now being viewed from a horizontal perspective (Friedman, Savage, Hanquinet, & Miles, 2015). By choosing items different than those preferred by older adults, younger generations legitimize new cultural forms (Arun, 2015b). Because of different tendencies or preferences among owners of voluminous cultural capital, distinctions arise between them. Nowadays, the distinction that occurs horizontally is one of the new forms of cultural inequality (Friedman et al., 2015). By developing new forms of cultural capital, younger generations establish (cultural) distance between themselves and their parents. Motion is ever being made away from legitimized traditional products toward more
modern products. Shifts in high culture away from traditional products to new forms can cause structural changes in the form and content of a specific field. Field shifts, including choices in product consumption, give rise to new class positions. Very little is known about new social positions or the resulting cultural consumptions and life arrangements. Comprehensive findings on economic, social, and cultural capital are not available for grasping what is transpiring at the national level. In order to analyze the unexpected horizontal positions and stratify under a shell, a new *modus operandi* is required. This is not simply the combined use of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. In addition to methodological pluralism, the perspective of intersectionality can be an analytical tool for determining the power of ageing, cohort, and period effects. As for the various types of social positions, what types of services will be offered and how will they be implemented by local governments in Turkey? In response to this question, methodological pluralism should be regularly used together with intersectionality.

What we are trying to offer here in the new *modus operandi* is that old age and aging cannot simply be described as a problem. Beyond describing older adults as victims, suffering and needy, this new modus operandi incorporates a perspective of intersectionality for generating recommendations to develop evidence based on empirical findings. Local governments, when providing compulsory services to these factions, should consider carrying out research from this perspective. Intersectionality of factors such as gender, age, and social class has a critical impact on the aging process. When planning to offer services to citizens with limited resources due to life circumstances, local governments in particular need to evaluate the disparities and advantages of its constituents in a refined manner. In this context, the lower class needs direct financial support, while the middle class primarily needs health and social care support to improve their social conditions. On the other hand, questions regarding the kind of needs older adults with high cultural, economic, and social capital have cannot be answered from top to bottom using a governance approach. Negotiations should absolutely be carried out with members of this group by including the administration and taking their contributions into consideration. Nowadays, instead of being concerned about centralizing affairs, local governments are apprehensive about how to apply decentralization. Given the creation of new social classes from both horizontal and vertical positions, it will be important to secure sustainable services to all social classes in the transition from centralized to decentralized governance, not only those deemed most fragile and weak, but also those perceived as imbued with greater strengths.


