

Being Old in a Country with a Large Youth Population: The Case of Turkey

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Abstract – This paper focuses on the ageing issue in Turkish society and it aims to draw a general framework of the percentage and life standards of old people in the country. National statistics and social policies are the main resources used to reach this aim.

Key words – Ageing; Ageing Population; Turkey; Policy Makers; NGOs

I. Introduction

Ageing is a multidisciplinary issue that is discussed in the framework of several sciences such as medicine, economics, psychology etc. Ageing is a period of life that differs according to the individual, his/her physical and social environment, health, economic well-being etc. For statistical and public administrative purposes, however, old age is frequently defined as 60 or 65 years of age or older. [1] In United Nations' classification of ages, the people at the age of 60 and over are called old. However, many developed countries uses the age of 65 for this limit. [2]

“Old age has a dual definition. It is the last stage in the life processes of an individual, and it is an age group or generation comprising a segment of the oldest members of a population”. [3] For both definitions, the increase in the ratio of the elderly in total population paves the way to population ageing which is defined as one of the greatest triumphs and challenges of humanity at the same time. [4]

Countries with a large population of old people and the ones with a large youth population undergo different challenges in the course of their developments in terms of many different aspects including the sociologic one. This paper focuses on the sociological aspect of ageing in the example of a specific country; Turkey.

One of the adjectives that is frequently used in defining Turkey is “young”, emphasizing the fact that the country has a very large youth population. Having a large youth population is an advantageous situation for a country for several reasons since young people constitute an indispensable group of resources. Young ages are times when mental and physical capacities of individuals are at the highest level. Therefore, having a large youth population means having a great amount of physical and mental power.

Youth population is directly related to birth rates and life span. Additionally, high birth rates are mostly detected in developing and under-developed countries rather than the developed ones. However, this is a data that is subject to change lately. Turkey is an example of these countries in which ageing has started to appear as an issue that needs to be discussed in several platforms and

at the same time in which the need for social policies has increased.

This study aims to draw a framework of the issue of ageing in Turkey.

II. Review of the Literature on Ageing

As it was noted earlier, ageing is a recurring theme in a wide range of study areas. Researchers have been interested in the different aspects of old age for a very long time. Several institutes, journals and centers have been started in order to focus on ageing. Some examples of institutes, centers and journals focusing on ageing are; International Federation on Ageing, National Institute on Aging, U.S., Institute for Ageing, UK, Oxford Institute of Population Ageing, UK, Ankara University Center on Ageing Studies, Turkey. Journal of Aging Studies, Age And Ageing, Ageing Horizons, Aging and Mental Health, Aging and Society, Turkish Journal of Geriatrics.

Besides these, many researchers have been interested in different aspects of ageing lately. Some examples of these studies can be categorized as the sociologic ones (Taşçı, 2010, [5] Nazlı, 2016, [6] Bornat, Dimmock, Jones & Peace 1999, [7] Fogel, 1997 [8]), the ones analyzing the subject from social policies point of view (Gee&Gutman, 2000, [9] Johnson, 1999, [10] Sen, 1994, [11] Vincent, 1996, [12]), the ones focusing on health and medical issues (Frith, Jones & Newton, 2009, [12] Mejeed&Aylin, 2005, [13] Macafee, Waller, Whynes, Moss, & Scholefield, 2008, [14] Rosenfeldt, Wilson, Lee, Kure, Ou, Braun & de Haan, 2013 [15]).

III. Demographic Data

The demographic data on Turkish population is the main source of the general overview of the nation in terms of population characteristics. According to the detections of Turkish Statistical Institute, there was a drastic change in Turkish population in terms of ageing between the years 1935 and 2015. [16]

Table I gives the median age of Turkish population from 1935 to 2015. It shows that the median age of Turkish society has increased 11,3 ages for males and 8,2 for females and 9,8 ages in total. Moreover, the median age has increased constantly from 1970 on. This change is an indication of a shift in the population characteristic of the country in terms of ageing and youth population. In addition to that, population projections, which are formulated basing on the address based population registration system and are valuable sources for governmental policy makers in foreseeing the upcoming situation in terms of population, put forward that Turkish population is going to continue ageing in the future, too. According to the 2012 statistics, the ratio of the old people- 65 years old and over- was %7,5 in this year. However, the population projections claim that this ratio will be %10,2 in 2023, %20,8 in 2050 and %27,7 in 2075. Another claim of the projections foresee that the total median age will be 34 in 2023; it will be 33,3 for men and 34,6 for women. [17]

TABLE I

MEDIAN AGE

| Census year | Total | Male | Female |
|------------------------|-------|------|--------|
| 1935 | 21.2 | 19.1 | 23.4 |
| 1940 | 19.6 | 17.7 | 22.4 |
| 1945 | 20.0 | 18.8 | 21.7 |
| 1950 | 20.1 | 19.2 | 21.3 |
| 1955 | 20.4 | 19.6 | 21.3 |
| 1960 | 20.3 | 19.5 | 21.1 |
| 1965 | 19.3 | 18.7 | 20.0 |
| 1970 | 19.0 | 18.6 | 19.4 |
| 1975 | 19.5 | 19.2 | 19.8 |
| 1980 | 19.9 | 19.5 | 20.3 |
| 1985 | 20.9 | 20.6 | 21.2 |
| 1990 | 22.2 | 21.9 | 22.6 |
| 2000 | 24.8 | 24.4 | 25.3 |
| 2007 ⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾ | 28.3 | 27.7 | 28.9 |
| 2008 ⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾ | 28.5 | 28.0 | 29.0 |
| 2009 ⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾ | 28.8 | 28.3 | 29.3 |
| 2010 ⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾ | 29.2 | 28.7 | 29.8 |
| 2011 ⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾ | 29.7 | 29.1 | 30.3 |
| 2012 ⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾ | 30.1 | 29.5 | 30.7 |
| 2013 ⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾ | 30.4 | 29.8 | 31.0 |
| 2014 ⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾ | 30.7 | 30.1 | 31.3 |
| 2015 ⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾ | 31.0 | 30.4 | 31.6 |

Source: Population Census, TurkStat, 2015

IV. The Role of Policy Makers and NGOs

Policy makers and NGOs are two vital figures in the attempts related to ageing population and the needs of the elderly.

In the light of the statistical determinants, policy makers develop new policies and both national and international organizations are to promote events helping to arouse awareness on this issue in order to provide citizens with the appropriate and necessary services for the elderly.

One example of these attempts is October 1st International Day of Older Persons which “is an opportunity to highlight the important contributions that older people make to society and raise awareness of the issues and challenges of ageing in today’s world.” [18]

Such days and policies addressing to the needs of the elderly are paving the way to the process of active ageing which “is the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.” [19] World Report on Ageing has summarized the needs of the elderly. There are 6 main points according to the report:

- “establishing policies and programmes that expand housing options for older adults and assist with home modifications that enable older people to age in a place that is right for them;
- introducing measures to ensure that older people are protected from poverty, for example through social protection schemes;

- providing opportunities for social participation and for having meaningful social roles, specifically by targeting the processes that marginalize and isolate older people;

- removing barriers, setting accessibility standards and ensuring compliance in buildings, in transport and in information and communication technologies;

- considering town-planning and land-use decisions and their impact on older people’s safety and mobility;

- promoting age-diversity and inclusion in working environments” [20]

As it is clear at these points, just like the other age groups, old people have their own needs, too. Not only the politicians but also the other social organizations should work on these needs in order to take the necessary precautions and formulate the correct solutions for the lives of the elderly.

In the next part of the study, the focus is specifically the old people in Turkey in the light of three main points in the outcomes of national statistics.

V. A Framework of the Old People in Turkey

Ageing is the ultimate step of all living things. However, the way ageing is experienced may differ depending on the time and place. From now on, a general framework of the elderly Turkey will be drawn by focusing on the sociologic determinants of the national statistics. The first point to be put under the spotlight is the cultural aspects.

The case of Turkey in terms of ageing and old people posits a picture which is a reflection of being a nation that is clinged to its traditional values. In other words, Turkey is a country in which people are still firmly bound to values of “culture, which surrounds all individuals and populations, shapes the way in which we age because it influences all of the other determinants of active ageing”. [21] This characteristic of the nation shows its reflections in the expectations of the elderly in Turkey. According to the Family Structure Survey of 2006, % 55 of all the elderly stated that they would choose to live with their children rather than any other place. As a result, most of the old people continue to live with their children or relatives in Turkey. However, this doesn’t mean that there is no need for nursing homes. In contrary to this traditional structure there are There are 333 nursing homes in total with a total capacity of 26 205. 21.281 people are actively living in these houses. [22] Another indication of this point is that the recent statistics revealed that the source of happiness at old ages is family for %66.8 of the old people. Despite being a country of citizens with strong family ties and obedience in traditions, Turkey is one of the many nations which are going under a transformation process in terms of family values. As citizen’s understanding of a family and taking care of the elderly in the family changes by time and as the population ageing increases the need for this kind of places grows.

Another important point in the statistical results is the issue of education. It has been detected that the ratio of the educated old population has increased lately. In 2013

%41.2 of the old population were primary school, %4.1 of them were secondary school, %5.2 of them were high school and %4.7 of them were university graduates. However, in 2014, these ratios were %42.1 for primary school graduates, %4.3 for secondary school graduates, %5.2 for high school graduates and %5.1 for university graduates. Another sociological aspect of this heading is the gender based results. The statistics revealed that males surpassed females in all levels of education which is an indication of the gender stereotypical situation in providing the opportunity of education. [23]

The last point to be discussed about the old people in Turkey is the place of residence. The statistics have showed that in the years between the years 2008-2014 the ratio of the elderly living in towns and villages was always more than the one of living in provinces and cities in total population. However, the statistics also revealed that the ratio of the elderly in both towns and villages and provinces and cities has increased which is again an indication of the ageing population. [24]

Conclusion

The study draws a framework of the elderly in Turkey in the light of demographic tables and statistical reports. According to these sources, Turkey will continue ageing. Additionally, old people in Turkey are keen on maintaining traditions and living with their children at their old age as a result of this attitude. Moreover, the elderly population is higher in towns and villages than the one in cities which is again an indicator of the continuance of traditions in such a way that the residence places such as villages are places where old people are able to live in a traditional atmosphere. In contrary with these outcomes, there is a statistical value that shows a change in the level of education of the old people in Turkey. There has been detected and increase in the education level of the old people. However, the gender stereotypes in reaching education is still alive in these outcomes which show that the males in Turkey are more educated than the females in all education levels.

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