POVERTY OF ELDERLY POPULATION AND SOCIAL POLICY
PRACTISES IN TURKEY

Ceylan SÜLÜ

Research Assistant, Gümüşhane University, Turkey, ceylan.sl@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

By the help of the developments in social and medical fields, it has been seen that average lifetime has almost doubled in comparison with two centuries before. This fact brings elderliness phenomenon forward as a social problem. Elderly population is progressively increasing in developed and developing countries, which poses various problems in social, economical and social security systems.

As the individuals grow older, they work less or lose the ability to work and they are exposed to discrimination, which makes aging-based poverty a current issue. For this reason, poverty of elderly is a major issue for elders. In order to improve
the situation of elderly, social policy-based practises are highly significant. Such implementations of social policy ought to aim an active, independent, decent and happy elderliness by considering changing demographic structure.

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**Objectives of Research**

The main objectives of this research are to describe the poverty of elderly, the universal phenomenon of elderliness and to indicate the significance of social policies and their practises which aim to prevent poverty of elderly.

In this regard;

- Specifying how poverty and elderliness are perceived in Turkey
- Determining how the elders are perceived by employers
- Stating the importance of increasing elderly rate by demographic data
- Analyzing what social policy implementations are practised and what needs to be done in order to prevent poverty of elderly

are among the objectives of this research.

**Significance of Research**

One of the primary problems which can be seen in developing countries is the aging population, which results from the increasing poverty rate and technological developments in medicine and science. This is also valid for Turkey. From this point of view, grounding on the elders, who form the great portion of the poor, anti-poverty social policies gain importance. In this study, anti-poverty social policies will be mentioned by stressing aforementioned universal reality.

**Literature Review**

In the beginning of research process, a research planning is to be done, which includes the general framework of research. A literature review is to be conducted subsequently.

Literature review process aims to identify what kind of scientific data exists, to ground the research on these data, to determine aspects of the issue and to conclude which aspect to be investigated.

**Hypothesis of Research**

- Poverty is a widely experienced problem of Turkey.
- Aging rate has a progressive course in Turkey.
• Fertility per person is thought to decrease as the age increases.
• Increasing elderly population is facing with the poverty.
• It is assumed that all of the data used in this research are valid and reliable.

Limitations
Since this research is to be conducted by using the current literature sources as an archive study, it is limited to the previous findings.

Methodology
In this research, an archive study is to be done by utilizing general scanning technique. General scanning techniques are the scanning regulations on a sample or a group of samples, which are used in order to induce about a universe (Karasar, 1994: 79).

Data Analysis
In this research, statistical data will be analyzed by reviewing previous studies. Acquired data from the analysis will be commented on with a critical view and scientific information. In order to keep research up-to-date, the latest data supplied by TUIK will be used.

Introduction
Aging is a universal and a considerable reality for all countries. Elders are the fastest-growing age group thanks to developing medicine technology. Increasing elderly rate brings a variety of problems with it. Health problems, loss of family and friends, sheltering, transportation, malnutrition, depressions only constitute certain parts of these problems. At the top of these problems comes the poverty of elderly.

“The main problem of elderly population facing today is the loss of revenue, hence the experience of poverty. Elderly population comprises the significant part of hazard group in the society” (Karadeniz ve Durusoy Öztepe; 2013: 78).

If we are to specify the reasons of poverty of elderly, wide informal labour in the country, weak coverage of social security system, insufficiency of retirement pay and age pension and income inequality are the leading factors.

“Popular culture characterises elders as senile, inauthentic, silent, nonproductive, conservative and nonprogressive creatures. Such beliefs continue existing in spite of well-supported opposing proofs” (Kornblum ve Julian; 2013: 308).

Either the employers and the society itself have misperceptions about elder workers. It is thought that elder workers are less productive, less healthier, poor in skills, more accident-prone and underperformer workers. Consequently, elderly population becomes unable to participate in the labor force and poverty rate increases.

Another factor which cannot be disregarded is that women are well ahead in terms of poverty of elderly rate. Furthermore social policy implementations fail to satisfy the needs, which
aggrieves women more in countries like Turkey which is a developing one and has conservative customs.

Social insecurity, low widow’s pension, higher average life time and higher frequency of chronic diseases cause women to suffer from the poverty deeper than males (Danış; 2009: 73).

Within this framework, examining the phenomenons of poverty and elderliness in detail and discussing what sort of social policy implementations are served to elders in Turkey are highly fundamental. Besides, TÜİK 2014 data provides a descriptive source for the current situation of elders. Poverty and elderliness descriptions are made in the first stance and elderly rate are subsequently analyzed by the data of ‘Elders in Statistics’, a study by Turkish Statistical Institute conducted in 2014. Poverty is considered to be the first phenomenon to analyze in the study.

The Concept of Poverty

Although poverty is as much old as the history of humanity, it has not been able to ranked in the order of importance for a while. However, it has been regarded as a burning question with the effect of the social mobility since 1960s.

Poverty has started to gain a denser meaning with globalization phenomenon and it has started to be one of the most significant social problems of both social sciences and all societies. It can be seen that when the concept of poverty is addressed, it is rather challenging to find an objective definition both due to the reasons of poverty and difference in observability and different standards between rich and poor. As poverty differs from person to person, country to country, and even inside the boundaries of countries. Poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon which includes social, cultural and economic factors (Karadeniz ve Öztepe; 2013: 79).

This situation makes it harder to find a universally accepted definition for the concept of poverty. When we examine the existing definitions:

In the most general sense, poverty is the condition of being unable to satisfy the needs. It is possible to describe poverty in two categories. Poverty, in the strict sense, means starvation and lack of shelter, in broad terms, however, it states falling behind the average of society despite of having basic food, clothing and shelter facilities (TÜİK; 2008: 32). Another significant point here is that poverty and deprivation ought not to be confused.

When poverty is discussed, people first think of being deprived without income. Low income and not being able to making a living are seen as one of the basic reasons of poverty. However, poverty has been recently seen as a multi-dimensional preception and it has included concepts like health, education and access.

As it is seen, the phenomenon of poverty consists of complex processes which get affected from various and interdepeding factors. The limitations in accessing to economic and social sources, which can be called as spiral of poverty, might be both the cause and the effect of poverty. When the causes of poverty in Turkey is considered, it is seen that extrapersonal factors are more extensive. Poverty, which gained importance in 1960s as social mobility increased, started to be in the agenda as a top-line problem in 1990s.

There are variety of factors which affect poverty in Turkey. Among the most predominant factors on poverty in Turkey are migration, labor force market, economic crisis, social security systems, education, family and solidarist elements (Metin;
Retiring elders loses great portion of their revenues and when they get retired, they cannot find a job and face with poverty.

One of the main causes of poverty of elderly is that there are prejudiced misperceptions about elder workers among both the employers and the society. Elder workers are perceived as less healthier, heavy handed, more accident-prone, underperformer workers and absenteeist.

Researches, however, have found that these prejudices are fallacious. It is revealed by the researches that elder workers, contrary to popular belief, cause less labor turnover, provide more stable work force, have lower absentee rate, are more optimistic about their jobs and have less working accident (Kornblum ve Julian; 2013:310-311).

Among these findings, poverty of elderly are seen as a significant factor which can be evaluated as both personal and social element. From this point of view, it would be more feasible to look into phenomenon of elderliness both as a cause and effect.

**The Concept of Elderliness**

_Elderliness is described as an extension of adulthood stage and a further phase of lifetime in which physical and physchological changes are seen._ Elderliness, which is generally described as such, is accepted as a period for which physical changes, psycho-social factors and chronology are also considered in order to describe (DURAK; 2004).

The phenomenon of elderliness, as in poverty, can be described in various types. Beginning from person’s birth, aging period initiates and this process continues as growth, developmental and change stage till death.

Each society has a different understanding of elderliness and the value it gives to its elders changes according to the culture it exists in. While, in some societies, the elder is a powerful tie, like a plane tree, who holds the family together, in others, elders are seen as a trammel with his/her decreasing energy of life and physical losses.

Elderly population is progressively increasing in developed and developing countries. Thanks to the advances in medicine field, infant mortality rate has decreased, care services have been improved, vaccines and medicines have cured diseases and birth rates have decreased by women’s participation in business life. Within these factors, there have emerged a kind of demographic structure which continually age.

While developed countries are able to maintain and protect the social prosperity standards of elders by foreseeing the situation and taking precautions, developing countries like ours are unable to implement necessary plans, policies and practices in paralell with aging rate of demography (DANIŞ; 2009:68).

The social policy practises for elders throughout the world are elderly care, old age asylum, home care services, elder clubs, advice centers for elders, nursery of elders, caring of elders and rehabilitation centers, flats for old persons, geriatric care center, mobile catering, guest house for elders, village for elders, mental cliniques and social contribution services for old persons (Çamur Duyan ve Önal Dölek; 2013:107).

There are various social policy implementations for elders in the world today. Certain precautions in order to make them more independent and save them from poverty started to be practised from past
to present “When elderly profile of Turkey is considered, it can be said that these practises are not evenly utilized. As a developing and progressively diversifying country, we ought to socialize our elders more actively and not to face our elders with the poverty. When considered from this aspect, the practices for elders in Turkey are senior center, nursery of elders, elders supervising centers by Ministry of Family and Social Policies, home care services by certain municipalities and geriatric services by certain universities“ (Çamur Duyan ve Önal Dölek, 2013: 107).

The most common practise in Turkey is the senior centers. There are 329 senior centers in Turkey. Family structures, which have been changed and transformed by modernization, have increased the importance of and demand to social policy institutions. The demand is progressively increasing. This increase in senior centers can be explained with the transformation of family structure.

The transition from extended family to elementary family has changed the place of the elder in the family. The majority of elders have started to live independently and this has lessened the social, moral and economic support of family and relatives to the elder. For this reason, elders increasingly prefer senior centers in which they can socialize with their peers instead of staying inside the family and becoming functionless.

In Turkey, so as to enhance the life quality of elders and respond to the transformations of family structures, current practices and services ought to be improved by reforming the capacities.

### Demographic Projection – From 1935 to 2075

Elderly population by sex and proportion of elderly population in total population, 1935-2075

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Elderly Population</th>
<th>proportion of elderly population in total population</th>
<th>Generel Sex ratio</th>
<th>Elderly sex ratio</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>1935</td>
<td>16 158</td>
<td>7 937</td>
<td>8 221</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>279</td>
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<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>17 821</td>
<td>8 899</td>
<td>8 922</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>271</td>
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<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>18 790</td>
<td>9 447</td>
<td>9 344</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>257</td>
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<td>1950</td>
<td>20 947</td>
<td>10 527</td>
<td>10 420</td>
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<td>1955</td>
<td>24 065</td>
<td>12 233</td>
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<td>1960</td>
<td>27 755</td>
<td>14 164</td>
<td>13 591</td>
<td>979</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>31 391</td>
<td>15 997</td>
<td>15 394</td>
<td>1 243</td>
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<td>1970</td>
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<td>17 598</td>
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<td>1975</td>
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<td>19 603</td>
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<td>1980</td>
<td>44 737</td>
<td>22 695</td>
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<td>2 113</td>
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<td>1985</td>
<td>50 664</td>
<td>25 672</td>
<td>24 992</td>
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<td>1990</td>
<td>56 473</td>
<td>28 607</td>
<td>27 866</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>64 730</td>
<td>32 399</td>
<td>32 331</td>
<td>3 859</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>68 861</td>
<td>34 491</td>
<td>34 370</td>
<td>4 647</td>
<td>2 011</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>70 586</td>
<td>35 362</td>
<td>35 224</td>
<td>4 865</td>
<td>2 096</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>71 517</td>
<td>35 901</td>
<td>35 616</td>
<td>4 893</td>
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The first cynosure in the figures is that elderly population is the fastest growing age group among others. Interpreting the situation by using United Nation’s definition, if elderly population in a country is between 8% and 10% out of total population, the population in that country is ‘old’, when the ratio is higher than 10%, it means that the population is ‘very old’. In Turkey has a fast increase tendency in comparison with other age groups (TÜİK; 2014: 1). Elder population ratio, which was under 5% until 1990’s, has rapidly increased for 15 years.

The highest elder population ratio has started to be seen with decreasing death rate. This increase is the combination of three demographic change: remarkable decreases in fertility rates which also decrease the quantity of young population, increases in life expectancy of all age groups and high fertility rates of previous years which inflated the numbers of people who reached 65 age (TNSA, 2014).

In comparison with other age groups, it can be clearly seen that elderly population ratio has the fastest increase rate. While population growth rate of Turkey was 13.3% in 2014, elderly population growth rate was 49.9%. In 2014, elderly population dependency rate was 11.8%, it is expected to be 19.% in 2030.

In the context of the population projections, it is thought that there will be two elders per each child in 2050 (Gökçe – Kutsal; 2005: 14).

The increase of elderly population ought to be evaluated as the experience and increasing knowledge of the elders. By the help of social
policy implementations, benefiting from elders’s experiences ought to be prioritized. Further more, if the necessary precautions are not taken properly, as can be seen in the figures properly, a possible high quantity of dependent population danger is waiting for Turkey and this can be the most significant problems of near future. Besides, women population in dependent population is one step ahead, which ought to be also taken into account.

In conclusion, when increasing elderly population rate is considered, it is estimated that elderly population ratio will rise to 10.2% and Turkey will be classified as ‘very old’ country in 2023 according to the projections. Although 65 or higher aged population ratio was 8% in 2014, it is predicted that the ratio will be measured as 10.2% in 2023, 20% in 2050 and finally 27.7% in 2075 (TÜİK; 2014: 1).

Elderliness, which has gained a momentum in the world, especially in Turkey, brings along the poverty of elderly. The fact that Turkey will have a ‘very old’ population in the coming years raises the importance of social policies in this field. The exclusion of elders from business life is assumed to make them dependent, discontent, passive and directly poor.

**Conclusion and Suggestions**

Elderly population in developed and developing countries is rapidly increasing and elderliness is becoming a progressive problem day by day. Following Industrialization period, women’s participation in business life and the transition from extended family to elementary family have paved the way for individualization of family members and changed the position of elders in the family.

Elders are not anymore perceived as ‘bonds’ and their care is gradually undertaken by institutions. Likewise, increasing elderly population and the decrease of the importance of elders in the families make them vulnerable to mass poverty.

At this point, the failure of social security systems in fighting against poverty, expulsion of elders from business life, socially insecure and informal workers, insufficiency of retirement pays are raising the poverty from day to day.

A large segment of the society, especially the employers, has misleading perceptions about elder workers, which has been proven by the researches on the contrary.

It is widely observed that especially in the third world it is social problems, rather than individual issues, which affect poverty of elders the most. Social service policies for low income and for those who are not included in social security systems and benefits remain incapable. Furthermore, the institutes of social services fall short of satisfying the needs. Besides, payments of benefits to elders are not able reach to a sufficient threshold which can suppress poverty of elderly.

Thus following solution proposals are presented for the poverty of elderly in the country:

Considering that women population come to the forefront with poverty of elderly, women need to be included in the labor market, where they ought to have a regular income and get social security benefits. In this context, the strongholds of women are required to be increased in the business life.

Lower limits of old age pension needs to be raised to level by which elders spend their life in peace.

Necessary proceedings about payments of benefits ought to be done properly, these payments ought to be increased.
Employers’ misconceptions about elderly must be forestalled and the experiences of elders ought to be benefited, 
An active lifestyle needs to be provided for elders, elder’s will to work ought to be ensured

Elders ought to be served with the opportunity to defend their own rights and they need to be supported by political incentives,

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Certain institutions ought to be founded for those who are obliged to pay rent, the quantity and coverage of current social service practises needs to be increased, especially for those who are incapable of caring themselves


