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Day Care Centers for Alzheimer's Patients in Türkiye: Demographic Change and Care Ethics, Political and Economic Implications

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ABSTRACT

Advancements in healthcare have extended life expectancy, accelerating the global shift towards aging populations and creating a growing need for comprehensive geriatric care. Among the most pressing challenges is dementia, with Alzheimer's disease (AD) standing as a significant societal and policy concern. AD is a progressive neurodegenerative disorder characterized by the irreversible decline of cognitive functions, including memory, reasoning, and problem-solving, leading to a loss of independence. Its onset, influenced by genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors, poses profound socioeconomic and emotional challenges for patients and caregivers alike. Current healthcare and social support systems often fall short in addressing the complex needs of individuals with Alzheimer's and their families, highlighting critical gaps in policy and service provision. Family caregivers bear the dual burden KEYWORDS: Dementia; Alzheimer's; Older People; Daycare.

of emotional distress and financial strain, with limited access to adequate support. Expanding specialized services, such as daycare centers, staffed by multidisciplinary professionals, including gerontologists, psychologists, physiotherapists, and social workers, provides a sustainable solution. These centers not only enhance the quality of life for patients but also alleviate the socio-economic pressures on families and the state. Addressing Alzheimer's care within the broader context of demographic transformation requires an integrated approach, combining public awareness, early diagnosis initiatives, and robust policy reform. Investments in community-based care infrastructure and caregiver support are vital to fostering fair and inclusive outcomes in aging societies. This transformation must be prioritized to mitigate the marginalization of older adults and ensure societal resilience in the face of aging population trends.

KEY PRACTITIONER MESSAGE

- Establishing Alzheimer's Daycare centers that offer multidisciplinary services involving healthcare professionals in every neighborhood can significantly alleviate the burden on families while providing a supportive environment for patients.
- Counseling and psycho-social support for families of Alzheimer's patients is important for managing caregivers' feelings of loneliness, helplessness, and guilt, fostering a community of shared experiences and solidarity.
- 3. Advocating and raising awareness of responsibility for the needs of Alzheimer's patients within Daycare services who may be unable to articulate their requirements is important for a dignified care process.
- 4. Strategies and services for Alzheimer's patients and families should be accessible to all families, regardless of income.
 For this aim, the existing care allowance system needs to be reviewed to better support the specific needs of Alzheimer's patients and their families.

INTRODUCTION

Advancements in healthcare have made increasing life expectancy an unstoppable phenomenon. This extended life expectancy has resulted in a longer aging period, bringing various challenges. However, policymakers and service providers focused on geriatric care have yet to address societal aging adequately. Millions of individuals and families are struggling with the issues brought on by the aging process (Shibusawa, 2024). As life expectancy continues to rise, concerns about the quality of life, resource distribution, and social care for older individuals are growing.

The older population is notably heterogeneous, encompassing diverse needs, expectations, and challenges shaped by varying health conditions, socio-economic statuses, and life-styles. While early death was once a dominant societal concern, advancements in healthcare and living standards have shifted attention toward managing the implications of prolonged aging.

Today, the aging period can extend to five decades, with many individuals leading active lives well into their later years (Gorres & Nachtmann, 2010). Scientific evidence suggests that humans may potentially live up to 125 years, and the number of centenarians is steadily increasing worldwide (Rott, 2004). By 2050, the global centenarian population is projected to exceed 3.7 million, reflecting the

unprecedented longevity trends in human history (United Nations, 2022).

While these advancements highlight human resilience, they also underscore the need for rethinking healthcare systems, pension schemes, and social support structures to accommodate a longer aging phase. For societies to adapt effectively, an initiative-taking focus on healthy aging policies, emphasizing preventive healthcare, technological integration, and community-based support systems, is essential (World Health Organization, 2021). The demographic shifts observed globally are mirrored in Türkiye, where rapid social and economic changes have significantly influenced population dynamics. This transition has placed aging at the forefront of national policy discussions, highlighting the urgency of addressing the unique challenges and opportunities it presents. As Türkiye's population matures, balancing the demands of an aging society with sustainable development becomes imperative. These trends underscore the inter-connectedness of global and local approaches to aging, emphasizing the need for context-specific solutions.

Türkiye's population reached 83.154.997 by the end of 2019 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2020). Fertility and mortality rates have declined, but the older population continues to grow. In the 1960s, the average Turkish woman had six children, reflecting high fertility rates typical of developing countries

(Tufan, 2007). By 2023, the fertility rate had dropped below replacement levels (2.1 children per woman), resulting in slower population growth and an aging demographic structure (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2023). The extent of a society's aging can be measured by indicators such as median age. Between 2007 and 2019, Türkiye's median age rose from 32.4 to 33.5, with the median age for men increasing from 31.7 to 32.8 and for women from 33.1 to 34.2 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2023). Barring radical changes in demographic indicators due to natural disasters, war, or migration, the aging trend is expected to continue. From 2013 to 2023, the proportion of people aged sixty-five and above consistently rose, from 7.7% in 2013 to 10.2% in 2023 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2023). Notably, within this age group, women outnumber men, primarily due to women's longer average life expectancy (Niederfranke, 1999; Turkish Statistical Institute, 2023). Currently, 10.2% of Türkiye's population, approximately nine million individuals, are aged sixty-five and older, officially classifying the country as a "very old" society by international standards (Turkish Republic Family and Social Policy Ministry, 2018). Projections show that by 2030, the older population will constitute 12.9% of the total population, driven by increased life expectancy and lower fertility rates. The aging trend is most pronounced among those aged eighty and above, a group whose numbers have grown by 266%

since 1960 (Tufan, 2007). Thus, demographic aging is approaching like a "tsunami" (Tufan, 2007, p. 23). The demographic transformation is driven by improvements in healthcare, reduced mortality, and increased longevity. However, these changes pose challenges to Türkiye's social, healthcare, and economic systems, especially as the older population often requires long-term care and specialized services (Canning & Lubet, 2023). One of the most significant challenges of old age is the growing need for longterm care (Tufan, 2007). The expected rise in longterm care expenditures due to the aging population poses significant societal challenges. Recent studies emphasize that the increasing economic burden may worsen social inequalities and intergenerational conflicts. These disparities are further complicated by a lack of universal policies tailored to support long-term care needs. For instance, the global caregiver shortage, highlighted in 2023 analyses, underscores the urgent need for innovative solutions, including better workforce incentives and technological aids to support caregiving systems. As studies on geriatric care increase, it is expected that long-term care expenditures will also rise. This trend suggests funding long-term care may intensify social inequality and create generational friction. As a result, older people may increasingly be marginalized in society, and the political system may face added pressure. Dementia-related illnesses,

particularly prevalent in old age, are among the most critical issues affecting the quality of life for patients and their families. In particular, older individuals with Alzheimer's disease present a growing challenge for society, which has yet to find a concrete solution to address this condition. The policy landscape lacks awareness of the actual number of Alzheimer's patients among us and the hardships their families endure (Tufan, 2016b).

Among aging-related health concerns, dementia and Alzheimer's disease significantly affect patients and caregivers. Studies reveal a growing prevalence of dementia worldwide, with Alzheimer's accounting for 60-70% of cases. However, despite its impact, adequate resources and policies are still lacking to support patients effectively and their families (World Health Organization, 2023). Alzheimer's disease is a chronic neurodegenerative disorder that results in total cognitive impairment and functional decline. Family members are the most usual caregivers worldwide, resulting in an increasing total burden and a subsequent degradation of their quality of life (Ibrahim et al., 2024).

One of the critical consequences of population aging is the rising prevalence of age-related illnesses, particularly Alzheimer's disease. Dementia-related conditions, including Alzheimer's, are significant contributors to disability among older adults globally, and Türkiye is no exception. Alzheimer's disease

prevalence is intricately linked to age, with significant increases seen among those aged seventy-five and older. Older adults represent a population in critical need of education, targeted prevention, early intervention, and increased workforce capacity on many levels. Yet we do not have a coordinated and comprehensive system of care that addresses the mental health needs of older adults (Miller et.a., 2024).

Recent estimates suggest that Türkiye's older population includes over one million individuals living with Alzheimer's disease, with numbers expected to rise in parallel with the growing older demographic (World Health Organization, 2023). The lack of national policies addressing the needs of dementia patients and their caregivers further worsens the issue (World Health Organization, 2023).

Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's Disease (AD) is a progressive and irreversible brain disorder that affects the central nervous system, leading to a gradual decline in cognitive functions. Primarily affecting older individuals, AD is classified as a neurodegenerative condition that results in diminished cognitive abilities, including memory loss, reduced reasoning and problem-solving skills, and other cognitive impairments that affect daily life activities (Alzheimer's Association, 2022).

The pathology of Alzheimer's is characterized by

the accumulation of amyloid-beta plaques and neurofibrillary tangles composed of tau protein within the brain. These protein build-ups disrupt neuronal communication, ultimately causing neuron death and brain atrophy, thereby driving the disease's progression (Scheltens et al., 2021).

Alzheimer's Disease (AD) is not caused by aging itself but is influenced by genetic factors, with the APOE $\epsilon 4$ allele being particularly associated with a higher risk of the disease. Environmental factors and lifestyle choices are also significant in its development (Barnes & Yaffe, 2011). Typical symptoms initially include memory loss, which may lead to speech difficulties, decision-making issues, and personality changes. In advanced stages, individuals may struggle to perform daily activities independently (Kessler & Kalbe, 2001).

Alzheimer's is not a modern phenomenon; it has historical references dating back over 4.500 years. Beauvoir (1977) highlights a passage from ancient Egyptian texts describing the mental and physical decline associated with old age (Beauvoir, 1977). Alzheimer's is classified as a neurodegenerative disorder marked by cortical dysfunction, which results in tissue atrophy and extensive neuron loss. Between 1991 and 2001, over 20.000 scientific studies on Alzheimer's were published, and the publication rate continues to increase by approximately 10% each year (Forstl et al., 2001).

The historical understanding of Alzheimer's provides valuable context for its modern characterization as a multifaceted and complex condition. While its prevalence increases with age, contemporary studies challenge the notion of Alzheimer's as an inevitable aspect of aging. Instead, they underscore the intricate interplay of genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors contributing to its onset and progression. This evolving perspective has paved the way for a more nuanced understanding of Alzheimer's, shaping both clinical approaches and societal attitudes toward the disease. In this scope, the concept of the "demented geriatric patient" is often found in the literature, which suggests that Alzheimer's, while prevalent in older adults, is not exclusive to aging itself. Modern research emphasizes that AD is not simply a disease of old age but a complex condition influenced by numerous factors that differ significantly among individuals (Lenzen-Großimlinghaus & Steinhagen-Thiessen, 2000).

Globally, Alzheimer's affects over fifty million people, with this number expected to rise as projected by the World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2022). It is most commonly diagnosed in those aged sixty-five and older and is more prevalent among women. The disease's progression correlates with age, affecting approximately 5-11% of individuals over sixty-five and up to 50% of those over 85 (Alzheimer Vakfi, 2022). According to the

International Alzheimer's Federation's 2012 report, global cases are projected to increase from 46.8 million in 2012 to 131.5 million by 2050 (Say Sahin, 2019). The OECD estimates that by 2050, over one hundred million people will face the economic and social impacts of chronic brain diseases like Alzheimer's, which is becoming a significant public health issue worldwide (OECD, 2017).

The first stages of Alzheimer's often go unaddressed by families due to the "strategic" coping behaviors of older people, which may mask the severity of the disease. This often leads to significant caregiving challenges as the disease progresses and the need for constant care intensifies.

Alzheimer Patients' Care and Its Socioeconomic Impacts

The increasing prevalence of Alzheimer's disease, closely tied to demographic changes, underscores the rising demands of caregiving as life expectancy increases. Advances in modern medicine and pharmaceuticals have extended the lives of individuals with serious health conditions, including Alzheimer's, often resulting in prolonged end-of-life care needs (Tufan, 2015, 2019). Families, traditionally the primary caregivers for Alzheimer patients, are facing an increasing burden due to several social dynamics, such as urban migration for work, which weakens family ties, later marriage ages, and higher divorce rates, all of which reduce family caregiving

capacity and support networks (Mayer & Baltes, 1996; Schneekloth, 1996).

The immediate family, such as a spouse, daughter, or daughter-in-law, typically provides care for Alzheimer's patients (Schneekloth et al., 1996). In the disease's initial stages, patients often adopt coping strategies that mask their condition, such as minimizing their symptoms, compensating with other skills, or avoiding social interactions. These strategies may delay family acknowledgment of the disease's severity, complicating the provision of effective care as the disease progresses (Schwerdt & Tschainer, 2002).

The increasing prevalence of Alzheimer's disease, driven by demographic aging, highlights the growing demands of caregiving in an era of extended life expectancy. Advances in modern medicine and pharmaceuticals have not only prolonged the lives of individuals with serious conditions like Alzheimer's but also extended the duration of caregiving, especially in the disease's advanced stages (Tufan, 2015, 2019). This phenomenon places significant pressure on families, who are traditionally the primary caregivers.

Bayram and Altinbas-Akkas (2023) conducted a study to evaluate the validity and reliability of the TR-RAWS-LTC measurement in assessing wandering behaviors in individuals with dementia within Turkish culture. The findings of the study suggest that, due to the

complex effects of dementia on cognitive functions, individuals' wandering behaviors may fluctuate over time. Additionally, Bayram and Altinbas-Akkas (2023) highlight that disorders such as restless legs syndrome are significant symptoms seen in the later stages of Alzheimer's disease. Beyond individual factors, the social context also plays a crucial role in Alzheimer's disease. Societal transformations have eroded intergenerational family bonds and caregiving capabilities, driven by factors such as urban migration for employment, delayed marriage, rising divorce rates, and declining birth rates (Mayer & Baltes, 1996; Schneekloth, 1996; World Health Organization, 2021). In the initial stages of Alzheimer's, patients often employ coping strategies, such as minimizing or concealing symptoms, which can delay family acknowledgment of the disease's progression. This delay complicates the prompt implementation of effective care strategies as the disease advances (Schwerdt & Tschainer, 2002). Given the complexity of Alzheimer's care, Rubenstein, Siu, and Wieland (1989) emphasize the need for a multidimensional approach that integrates medical, functional, psycho-social, and environmental support. This comprehensive care model is crucial for addressing the prolonged and multifaceted needs of dementia patients (Forstl et al., 2001). Despite recommendations. national healthcare these systems continue to face significant financial and

structural challenges. For example, Germany distributed approximately €12.5 billion annually for dementia care in 2001, with total costs-including indirect expenses—reaching €25 billion (Ozbabalik & Hussein, 2017). In the U.S., Alzheimer's and other dementias are projected to cost \$1.1 trillion by 2050, factoring in both healthcare expenses and unpaid family caregiving (Alzheimer's Association, 2023). Since the concept of day care is not yet fully recognized in Türkiye, it has not become widespread as a preferred service in social care services (Oglak, 2010). For the first time in Türkiye, the regulation on "Day Care and Home Care Services to be Provided at Older People Service Centers" was enacted on August 7, 2008, by being published in the Official Gazette No. 26960. This regulation introduced the opening of day care centers for older adults who prefer not to stay in nursing homes and included provisions for related units and personnel. Under this regulation, the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services, along with other public institutions and private legal entities, were authorized to open day care centers for the older people. The first example in Türkiye was the "Alzheimer's Day Care Center," opened in Nazilli, Aydin Province, under the leadership of Prof. Dr. İsmail Tufan (Tufan, 2016a). Furthermore, in response to the increasing demand for care in the country, and as a solution model for family members and older adults

who do not prefer nursing homes, the "Day Care Center Employment Project for Social Care Activity Staff" was initiated in 2009 by the Izmir Governor's Provincial Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation, supported by the European Union. In recent years, particularly in municipalities of the Aegean, Mediterranean, and Marmara regions (Antalya, Ankara, Izmir, Bursa, Eskisehir, Mersin), although not fully termed as day care centers, services such as "healthy aging and solidarity centers," "older adults' homes," and "older adults' centers" have been observed to provide day care services. Additionally, there are several day care centers that have been opened by the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services and the Alzheimer's Foundation (Oglak, 2018).

The Ministry of Family and Social Services, taking into account the aging data of our country, prioritizes the implementation of various services in collaboration with local governments, NGOs, and legal entities. In this framework, to provide day care services for older individuals, a total of 30 Older People Day Care Centers, 3 of which are independent and 27 are affiliated with institutions, have been established under the Ministry. Additionally, there are 161 older day care centers actively operating, including 127 under municipal authorities and 3 under civil society organizations (Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2024).

Another recent important concept is the Antalya Metropolitan Municipality Blue House [Mavi Ev] model. The "Mavi Ev - Alzheimer Patient and Caregiver Meeting Center," opened in collaboration with the Antalya Metropolitan Municipality and the National Association of Social Applied Gerontology, began operations in January 2016. The institution was selected as one of the most original social projects in the "Cities Competing with the World - Local Governments Competition." This institution also won first place in the "Good Governance Projects" category at the "Effective Municipality Project Competition," organized by the Local Administrations Research and Development Center that year. At Blue House [Mavi Ev], older individuals engage in activities led by specialists, which not only provide enjoyment but also refresh their minds. The center which is one of the most significant Alzheimer's centers not only in Türkiye but also in Europe, stands out as an important initiative that can alter the course of Alzheimer's and dementia diseases related to aging. It embraces patients and their families fighting diseases associated with aging, provides daily transport services for patients, who are picked up from their homes in the morning and brought back in the evening. After conducting blood pressure, sugar measurements, and medication follow-ups, patients participate in brain exercises led by experts. Walking in the large garden helps maintain the functionality

of the muscle system and keeps body muscles fit. Through musical activities, the lost sense of orientation of patients is revived (Akdeniz University Gerontology Department, 2022).

To mitigate these challenges, sustainable strategies are needed, such as expanding formal care infrastructure, increasing caregiver training programs, and adopting community-based support systems. Additionally, public policies should emphasize preventive measures, early diagnosis, and integrated care networks to balance the growing demands of caregiving with limited resources (Christensen et al., 2022; World Health Organization, 2021).

Daycare Centers for Alzheimer's Patients and Their Families

The environment had a significant impact on managing the challenging behaviors that can arise with Alzheimer's disease (Pamuk, 2015). In this respect, daycare centers may also offer an important opportunity. Opening daycare centers is recommended as an initiative to ease the burden on Alzheimer's patients, their families, and the state. By distributing the load of care, Day-care centers would make it more manageable.

At an Alzheimer's Patient and Family Daycare Center, services should be provided by a multi-disciplinary team composed of a gerontologist, nurse, social worker, physiotherapist, psychologist, occupational therapist, and older care technician. A gerontological

evaluation of patients diagnosed with dementia should be conducted in healthcare institutions, and a daily program that will enable the patient to adapt to the institution should be prepared. Alzheimer's patients could be picked up from their homes by a service vehicle in the morning and returned to their homes in the afternoon.

In Alzheimer's Patient and Family Daycare Centers, service planning is conducted with the quality of life of both patients and their family members in mind. Services planned for Alzheimer's patients: Ensuring the safety of the patients by preventing risky situations that may arise if the Alzheimer's patient is left alone at home; providing cognitive and social support to the patients through various activities; slowing the progression of the disease; supporting the patients' daily activities; reducing behavioral problems; and delaying or preventing the transition to long-term full-time institutional care (Ozbabalik & Hussein, 2017).

Services planned for family members of Alzheimer's patients: Enabling caregivers or family members to receive consultation services on Alzheimer's disease and care; sharing the care-giving burden of families with Alzheimer's patients; reducing feelings of loneliness, helplessness, and guilt that families may experience; providing psycho-social support to the family; and creating opportunities for caregivers to meet, offering them a chance to build solidarity

In countries with a high incidence of Alzheimer's disease, using Daycare services is a strategy to improve patient care (Gómez-Gallego & Gómez-Gallego, 2021). Daycare services are one of our country's newly developing institutional support services (Korkmaz Yaylagul et al., 2021). With the aging population and the rising costs of health care, the importance of providing institutional support services, such as Daycare, to meet the health, social, and other needs of the older and their families will continue to increase (Korkmaz Yaylagul et al., 2021). Daycare centers are proposed to be set up in every neighborhood, also serving as consultation centers for Alzheimer's patients and their caregiving family members.

CONCLUSION

We need innovative ideas and suggestions to solve the care problems of older individuals with Alzheimer's disease. Solutions should provide a profound improvement in the conditions of the patient, significantly relieve the burden on families, guarantee high-quality care, and support women's employment. In doing so, it should also take into account social developments related to the need for care, especially demographic aging, future issues, and intergenerational relationships. The proposal to set up an Alzheimer's Daycare center in every neighborhood would be a crucial step in

this direction. We must take the first step to achieve a larger goal. We should see the long-term care needs in old age as a meaningful test of our society and culture. To overcome this ethical, political, and economic challenge, we must unite as a community to show perhaps the most vulnerable members of our society—older individuals with Alzheimer's disease—that we stand by them. Private nursing homes and care home models are primarily available only to low-income families. At the same time, these institutions do not provide proper care services for Alzheimer's patients. The "care allowance" paid for those in need of care depends on the family's income, so not every family can receive help from this opportunity, and it is believed that the care allowance cannot be a significant factor in the care of Alzheimer's patients. The specific knowledge needed for Alzheimer's patients is not met through the care allowance. Alzheimer's patients are not in a position to express this demand, so we must take responsibility for them and voice this demand on their behalf. This will also add a new dimension to our concept of "respect for the older." Older individuals will face a better life, families will feel relief, the care sector will rethink its goals, and social policy will discover new roles and aims for itself. Neither humans nor society can prevent aging, but with strong policies, we can ensure that both evolve in a controllable direction. Daycare centers for Alzheimer's patients, known

as adult day services (ADS), have become essential in many countries to provide relief to caregivers and keep patients' quality of life. These centers offer structured programs that include cognitive stimulation, social interaction, physical activity, and medical care tailored to the needs of dementia patients (Alzheimer's Association, 2022). As of 2016, 4600 adult day programs served approximately 286.300 older adults throughout the United States (Gaugler et al., 2021). Similar models in Nordic countries emphasize patient autonomy and family involvement, supported by public funding to ensure fair access. Japan, facing a rapidly aging population, has integrated these centers within its long-term care insurance system, reflecting the importance of governmental support for such initiatives (Ikeda et al., 2022). The socioeconomic impact of these centers is multifaceted. They reduce the financial strain on families by offering affordable care alternatives compared to full-time nursing homes. Additionally, they help caregivers maintain employment and mental health by alleviating the intense demands of 24/7 caregiving (Zarit & Zarit, 2015). However, low-to-middle-income countries (LMICs), limited funding and infrastructure often restrict the availability of Daycare centers. In these regions, the burden falls heavily on families, worsening socioeconomic inequalities (Prince et al., 2016).

Studies suggest that public-private partnerships and community-based models can improve access to such services in resource-limited settings, showing the need for innovative approaches to bridge these (World Health Organization, 2021). In Türkiye, the development of Daycare centers is still in its infancy despite the rapid increase in dementia cases. As part of Türkiye's efforts to improve the quality of life for older individuals, various service models have been implemented by the Ministry of Family and Social Services. Under the Integrated Care Services Model, approximately 140,000 older individuals receive home care services (Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2024). Additionally, through the Older Support Program (YADES), initiated in 2016, a total of 128.491 older individuals in 87.797 households across 35 municipalities have been reached through 61 different projects as of January 2024 (Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2024). These figures highlight the scope and impact of services provided to support Türkiye's aging population and enhance their quality of life. Existing centers are limited in number and often found in urban areas, leaving rural populations underserved. Türkiye could implement a nationwide program modeled after Japan's long-term care insurance system, ensuring public funding and integrating care centers into the healthcare infrastructure to address this gap. Additionally, tax incentives for private sector

investment in Daycare facilities could stimulate their growth. Public awareness campaigns to destigmatize Alzheimer's and training programs for caregivers would complement these efforts, fostering a comprehensive approach to dementia care. By prioritizing accessibility and affordability, Türkiye can better address the needs of Alzheimer's patients and their families, mitigating the socioeconomic challenges posed by an aging population.

Aging should be considered in both individual and societal contexts (Tufan, 2007). Society has common goals and a shared understanding of life, which arises from the unity of people in search of meaning based on these. The aging of individuals affects society, and the aging of society affects individuals. Aging does not mean danger or disaster. It brings new opportunities that have not been perceived until now.

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