

The effect of transformation on the well-being of older people from the aspect of social relations: results from a field study carried out in two urban renewal districts

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Abstract

This small scale study focuses on the impact of urban renewal on the well-being of older adults from the aspect of social relations in two shanty town districts of Ankara, Turkey. The study adopted an ecological perspective based upon the tradition of environmental gerontology which attempts to understand how the physical environment built influences the lives of older adults. The study utilized semi-structured interviews involving 14 Turkish adults 60 years of age and over. This ethnographic fieldwork research aimed to better understand how transitions in living environments, either through adaptations to existing residential locations or through relocations to new environmental settings influenced the older adult's wellbeing. The study found that the transition to new housing arrangements resulted in reduced level of social networks and on the contrary closer relations with family members living at the same apartments. While the findings of the study cannot be generalized they represent an important step in flagging a need for more detailed research due to the rapid urban renewal projects now underway in Turkey. The study concludes with a call for the adoption of an "age friendly city" approach to urban renewal.

Keywords: *Aging, environmental gerontology, urban renewal, well-being*

Introduction

The study of human ecology is concerned with human beings and their relationships with their surrounding environment both social and physical. Law (1991) defines environment "... those contexts and situations which occur outside individuals and elicit responses from them." Law (1986) highlighted the person-environment connection by emphasizing the potential for both adaptive and maladaptive responses to the external environment (cited in Law et al., 1996:11). The field of gerontology has a record of utilizing a framework of ecological thinking in terms of exploring the health, well-being and quality of life of older people (Kendig, 2003; Wahl and Weisman, 2003; Fernández-Ballesteros, 2011). Consideration must also be

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given to the importance of person-environment relationships in order to gain a true understanding of human behaviours including the wellness status of individuals (Baum, 2002; Rapport et al., 1998; Law et al., 1996). The place and neighbourhood that we live in is usually very important, however, it becomes increasingly important for older people because the properties of the external environment can either increase or decrease their living standards with implications for health, well-being and quality of life (Jiriko, 1999). For older people, particularly those with disability the neighbourhood in which they reside can have a great effect on their physical and social well-being. Physical effects include being close to services provided for older people, commercial centres, recreational areas, support networks such as friends and family, transportation facilities and also convenience of the street lightning, crime rates, and landscape. The social elements that affect the well-being of older people are the interactions established in their living environment such as their possibility of communication with others (Kart and Kinney, 2001).

The concept of 'aging in place' has been an important focus in gerontological research literature throughout the last few decades and fits comfortably with the endeavour of environmental gerontology (Black, 2008; Wiles et al., 2012). In simple terms, the notion of aging-in-place is concerned with an older person being able to live in a residence of their choice while at the same time being able to have access to services and support to meet their needs as required. For Wiles et al. (2012) the concept of '*aging-in-place*' refers to the "functional, symbolic, and emotional attachments and meanings of home, neighbourhoods and communities" (p. 357). The aging in place phenomena is based on the aging of older people in the neighbourhood where they have been living for a long time and thus living in a familiar and reliable environment resulting in the well-being of older people (Novak, 1997). A considerable amount of research has been done on the effects of the neighbourhood on the well-being of community dwelling older adults (see Gardner, 2011; Lager et al., 2013). When the place of residence is taken into account the most important factors effecting the well-being of older people are the level and frequency of social relationships and the availability of social support networks in the environment (Lager et al., 2013).

In Turkey, shanty homes that result from the immigration from rural areas to bigger cities are constructions that are built in a very short time with no closely monitored building requirements or legal groundwork. Because of the neo-liberal policies in Turkey and the progressive inflow of rural people to the major cities the growth of shanty towns displayed rapid growth after the 1990s resulting in large scale measures to transform residential neighbourhoods. These transformations were undertaken by little regard for a 'participatory approach' with older residents (Eni and Abua, 2014) and done by offering the owners of the shanty homes other apartments either in or close to their original residential location or from another location in the city. In either case, the socio-economic and physical structure of the pre-existing districts changed drastically resulting in the need for older people to deal with the challenges of adjusting their lifestyles to a totally transformed environment. Owners of the shanty homes are generally those people who migrated to the big cities during the 1960-1970's and at the time of the present research the most part were aged 60 and over. The transformation of neighbourhoods through urban renewal impacts previous lifestyles and social networks resulting in the need for new orientations and ways of behaving due to the structure of different environmental settings.

This study aims to present how changes in the living environment due to neighbourhood transformations in two shanty town districts of Ankara have im-

pacted the social networks of older residents.

Theoretical frame

The ecological theory of aging has been developed by Lawton and his friends suggesting that the different properties of the living environment may put pressure or affect the emotional wellbeing of older people. Lawton states that if older people do not accommodate themselves to the environmental conditions the resulting stress affects them negatively (cited by Phillipson, 2007).

The memory formed throughout the life of older people supports the sense of belonging. The sense of space is one of the most important part of this sense of belonging and this feeling helps the well-being of individuals (Kart and Kinney, 2001).

In his study Gardner (2011) focuses on the effect of the place on well-being and life standard. In this respect the main feature of the neighbourhood to provide for the well-being of older people is the supportive and strong social networks it creates. Social networks are the sum of the relations that can be distinguished in the society and that people find meaningful. Social support signifies the level of functional and qualitative aspects of social networks (Faquinello and Marcon, 2011). Kahn and Antonucci (1980) state that social relations due to their social support aspect have positive effects on the health and well-being of older people. Studies after Kahn and Antonucci prove that social support and relation networks also contribute to the self-efficacy and the sense of control of older people (cited by Phillips et al., 2010; Birren, 2007). Social networks start with the family reaches up to local and even wider supportive networks (Gardner, 2011). Even though family is seen as the most important social support a lot of research states that non-family supports are very important for old people (Hughes, 1990).

When a neighbourhood is transformed through urban renewal or when older people change their residential location this usually results in a mix of outcomes both positive and negative in terms of human relationships and meanings associated with changes to the physical environment. This situation has drawn the attention of the researchers in England in the 1950 and 1960's. Studies have been focused on the social transformation of the neighbourhood around the same time in the United States (Phillipson, 2007). In his study Ekström (1994) has stated the psycho-social state of older people who moved to a different place due to the regeneration of their homes in Sweden in terms of trust-distrust, security-insecurity, weakness, pulling oneself away, the feeling of belonging, shame, pride and dignity. He has proven that these feelings have been experienced by older people. The effect of urban renewal on the well-being of older people has also been researched in terms of the psycho-social behaviour (Ekström, 1994).

In his study Phillipson emphasizes the effect of globalization on the living environment of older people and on the power relations that arose. He states that the transformation of the neighbourhood on older people causes introversion and differentiation besides the psycho-social effects. A class difference between the residents left behind and the new comers resulting in social exclusion usually exists (Phillipson, 2007; Buffel et al., 2013). Class differences are more visible in new transformed neighbourhood. In this study psycho-social factors such as identity and the feeling of belonging as well as the class difference of older people and their neighbourhood will also be taken into account.

The research field, before and after

Ankara Şentepe and Birlik districts are places where immigrants from cities and rural districts close to Ankara have been settled since 1960's. Immigrants were farmers who were not able to support themselves and their family financially, they were illiterate or had basic reading skills. They have moved to city because of the availability of better job opportunities, education and health services. After migration they worked either as low level government employees, unskilled workers while others were able to establish their own businesses as tradesmen.

During the process of immigration previous immigrants are of importance. The late comers find jobs and/or a place to build their shanty homes through the first comers. This situation is called chain immigration and causes the immigrants who came from the same rural areas to form cluster in these neighbourhoods. This is how Kızılcahamam people or Gerede people who are from around the same region were able to form close relations with each other. Owners of the shanty homes during the construction of their homes, in the process of job hunting and bearing kids have an informal support network with their fellow countrymen.

After the end of 1990's transformation of these two districts took place. The most important feature of these two districts is that the owners of the shanty homes have not been sent somewhere else in the city but they were settled in the new apartments built in the place of their shanty homes. People who have moved to these districts after the transformations belong to the middle class or the newly formed middle class. Their education and economic levels are usually higher than the old habitants. Class differences therefore are more prevalent at those districts.

Method

This study uses the results of a fieldwork of a dissertation study carried out between 2003 and 2008. The field work has been carried out in Ankara, Şentepe and Birlik district urban renewal areas. Families who have moved to shanty homes between 1960 and 70's and changed their shanty homes to apartments, and still living in those areas have been recruited for this study. 10 families from each districts, in total 20, have been interviewed in addition to informal interviews with local service provider concerning urban renewal processes. Semi structured questionnaires have been used and observation and field notes were taken. Even though not considered during the study planning, the older age of respondents experiencing urban transition has prevailed the study findings. This research focuses on the findings of 14 respondents (8 women, 6 men) over the age of 60 only to reveal their experiences on urban transition. The majority of the interviews have been done at homes of the respondents and lasted between 55 and 120 minutes. Multiple visits have been done in order to be able to interview all family participants. The interviews were named with an abbreviation of initials and age.

Respondents were recruited by snowball sampling. Interviewees were limited to those who had been allocated one or more than one apartment as a replacement for their demolished shanty homes and who had lived in their new homes for at least two years following relocation.

All the interviewees were informed of the context and purpose of the research and they were subsequently requested to sign a consent form. It is generally known that recording devices may result in some interviewees being made anxious and agitated resulting in less than satisfactory responses to the interview process. Because of this concern interviews notes have been taken and later transcribed for subsequent descriptive analysis.

Results

Old and new relationships following urban renewal

In shanty home neighbourhoods the social networks of older people are shaped by fellow countrymen and relative relations. Previous shanty home owners, who have migrated from rural areas and who were dependent on support networks such as their fellow countrymen to find jobs and own a house, have maintained their existence for years in their old shanty home neighbourhoods by the help of these relations. It is observed that during the transition process from shanty homes to apartments these relations have been weakened which was perceived by older people negatively. For older people who have survived with face to face relations until this time it is not quite possible to develop new way of relations (Buffel et al., 2013). In these situations the feeling of nostalgia and loneliness kicks in. A participant female D. age 62 explains the situation as such:

We are alone here. In past, I used to feel that this district was mine. Because I had many close-friendships here. Now, everything is changed.

When his relations with his relatives and fellow countrymen were asked M. age 64 replied as such:

We were all together in the old times, however these days we only see each other either at weddings or funerals.

Simmons (1977) states that for the Dutch worker class the street and the neighbourhood have positive effects on the relations of the habitants with each other (cited by Lager et al., 2013). Shanty homes with their small gardens, insecure and especially one story buildings in which the doors are usually unlocked, are semi-isolated places. This is why the possibility of forming relations on the street is much easier than in the apartments. Areas that are transformed to the apartments are more secure and isolated places. Now because the streets are open to the incoming traffic and because of the new shops opened on the first floor of these new buildings it is not possible especially for the women to sit in front of their homes. A participant female İ. age 67 explains the situation as such:

There are work offices on the first floor in this building. It is not possible to sit in the garden for us. We don't feel comfortable there because men come in to the work offices.

Another factor preventing sitting in front of the doors which in turn results in higher possibility of forming relations on the street, are the new neighbours. Neighbours coming from a higher class do not like the previous shanty home owners to sit in front of their buildings. According to them this is not an appropriate behaviour in the modern urban life. Living on higher floors is also a physical obstacle for older people to go out and maintain their old routines. Because of all these reasons the transformation of the place prevents informal encounters on the outside. Two female participants explain the situation as such:

In the old days all our neighbours were outside, we were not going inside during the day time. Everybody was cooking something and we were all eating together. Now the new comers don't like us. Anyway, who are you going to sit with outside in front of the door, everybody went somewhere else. F. (63)

You cannot sit outside the apartment. It can be considered as disgraceful. Neighbours can sometime warn you... We stay in the balcony, when we need open. M. (61)

Feeling of support is an important issue among the participants. They state that in sickness, in weddings and funerals when people need others they come together with their relatives living on the same neighbourhood and supporting the person in need. They tend to describe their lives in the shanty homes as neediness and struggling for life. However in their lives now "they have everything but joy". They state that in their previous lives everybody was helping each other but now nobody cares about the others. Under these circumstances the feeling of loneliness and insecurity dominates. A participant male M. age 64 explains the situation as such:

In the old days we had many stories about solidarity with neighbours. We needed our neighbour's help. Because of that we had close and good relations with our neighbours in past. Now, people have to survive alone.

In the shanty homes people visit their neighbour's uninvited whenever they wanted to, however the isolated structure of the new apartments causes these informal visits to occur less or cease. Even this is an experience dependent on relations and on the physical properties of the place as well. The shanty homes are open to the outside world more than the apartments thus resulting in formation and sustainability of neighbour relations. Since the isolated structure of the new apartments prevent older people from visiting their neighbours informally, the participants stated that instead of those visits they spend time either at home watching TV or going to parks and mosques. A participant female M. age 61 explains the situation as such:

I spend my time at home. Generally I watch TV at home. I do pray (*namaz*) at home. Sometimes I go to the park near here with my husband.

In neighbour relations it is important that the economic and cultural capitals be alike. However besides these, references such as ethnicity, language, religion, education level and area of interest are also needed. This kind of relation, which emphasizes on socio-cultural and economic differences result in the individual's distinction of himself from others (Bourdieu, 1992). For the previously shanty home owners this relation is separating themselves from the neighbours who are the newcomers to the neighbourhood. Some of the participants state this situation such as: "we call them 'the new comers' and they call us 'shanty home owners.' In shanty homes neighbours have similar cultural codes and belong to the same class however in apartment neighbourhoods a more heterogeneous structure is formed because of capital and cultural code differences. This is why the neighbour relations formed are not the same as formed in the shanty homes. Hence, the previous shanty home owners get in relation with either old neighbours from their shanty homes or with neighbours who have similar backgrounds as themselves. The transformation process results in a decrease in the number of neighbours of older people. On the other hand they have difficulty in forming relations with the new comers and thus spend most of their times in their apartments. In terms of older people, weakening of these relations results in loneliness, insecurity and alienation. One of the female participant states this situation such as:

We knew people and all children in the shanty home district, we knew who was ill, who would marry, who was alive, who died. Now, we do not know people near us in

apartments. We have lived here for 5 years. Even in our apartment, we don't know who lives here. I think, if we die here, nobody will come... İ. (67)

The social environment is an important informal support resource whenever older people needs to be taken care of or needs support (Lager et al., 2013; Buffel et al., 2013). The participants' biggest fear is finding nobody around them to help when they are in trouble or in any dangerous situation. One of them states his fear as such:

The neighbourhood is not the same as before. The old neighbour relations are not there anymore. If we die here right now, only the fire-fighters will open our doors. F. (71)

In general, older people miss the old relation networks and complain about not being able to replace those relations with anything else. The physical structure of the apartments is also thought to be an obstacle which causes older people to stay at home. They prefer to go to the park or mosque when the weather is nice. Being satisfied with the comfort of the apartments weakening or disappearing of the relations result in lessening of the feeling of belonging to the neighbourhood and separation from the new coming neighbours. The transforming of the relation based on solidarity in their old life style causes older people to feel insecure and lonely.

Intergenerational relations

According to Bourdieu (1996) family is the place where different capitals are saved, protected and produced. However every action has a symbolic dimension. In intergenerational relations the transfer and the multiplication and reproduction of the capital does not only take place in the economic dimension. This relation is transformed into codes such as blood, love, gratefulness (Bourdieu, 1996). From this perspective, the relations between the mother, father and their children involves varying degrees of sacrifice and contribution. In the study it can be said that the basis of living together as a family in the same apartment or close by is based on reciprocity which became an important part of family relationships following the transformation of the shanty homes.

The elderly who have exchanged their shanty homes with more than one apartment usually live in one of the apartments themselves and letting their married son and his family live in the other. First of all, this behaviour is related to the elderly's wanting their kids close to themselves. As the individual gets old he feels alone and needs to feel secure against the consequences of aging. İmamoğlu and İmamoğlu (1996) in their comparative study show that older people in Turkey want to live next door with their kids more than older people in Sweden do, and they state this as a cultural trend. This situation shows that the living environments in Turkey possess big family features, in functional and psychological means. In a similar way in both districts older people who have exchanged their homes for more than one apartment live as neighbours in the same building with their kids. Families whose job and income are conjunct and who live in the same building but different apartments were found. This is why some participants state that they sustain their old neighbour relations with their kids and daughter in laws and they take care of their grandkids if the parents are working. They also state that if they need anything their kids are there to help them.

We do not need anybody else. I got three apartments for my share and I live here. In the two apartments downstairs our sons live. One of our daughter in law is working and we took care of their kids for two years and now we take them to school. My wife

cooks, and they come and eat sometimes. In short we are neighbours with our own kids ...they help us too. M. (64)

There was a coffee-house here. Sometimes I used to go there. Now there are neither friends nor coffee-houses, here. I stay at home, sometimes my children take us to go somewhere. We spend our time with our children. A. (62)

Most of the older people in Turkey expect security, nursing and care from their family. This situation brings up the subject of living together or close to kids and grandkids which in turn may cause conflict and tension in the family relations. On the other hand, kids depend on their parents because of the city life, nourishing of their own kids and financial problems are also commonly found in Turkey (Danışoğlu, 1996). Because the participants cannot develop new relations in their transferred neighbourhoods, their physically closeness to their kids increase and so does the frequency of their relations. Some state that this closeness with their kids causes discomfort, gossiping and may result in arguments with daughter in laws. Arguments and tension can occur between mothers and daughter in laws who live in the same apartment or in the same building.

I wish I did not allow our son and daughter in law to move here. I really regret that. We generally quarrel with my daughter in law. She is not kind, she does not have filial piety. E. (65)

Discussion

The weakening of the relations and social support was found to be the main complaint of older participants together with the increase of insecurity towards their neighbourhood. Karataş in his study carried out in 2000 states that not being able to join actively the living environments may create instabilities in their emotional worlds resulting in extreme anger and sadness when they come across different situations. Weakening or diminishing of previous social networks and not being able to form new relations in new apartment's also decreases the daily social support of older people and environmental pressure (Lawton, 1986). Older people whose culture is shaped according to their previous relations cannot replace those relations with new ones also because of their economic and social properties and thus they alienate. Different social classes in neighbourhood relations appear as power relations resulting from the differentiation of life styles. Newcomers shape a new environment relevant to their lifestyles related to their social classes and their predominance. New rules, unfamiliar to the older neighbourhoods are created and caused "social inclusion" as Phillipson (2007) has pointed.

In newly formed neighbourhoods, family relations evolve more intense. This might create advantages regarding social support but on the other hand closer relations cause conflicts among family members.

The establishment of planned apartments instead of shanty homes may create new activity areas for older people. Especially parks are important places where older people spend their time. If facilities permit, those places can be places which increase the physical activity of older people, help develop social networks and the feeling of belonging resulting in decrease of stress and depression (Gardner, 2011). This study is of importance because the transformation of the cities in Turkey is commonly practiced and it puts forth the necessity of the creation of new social possibilities for older people in order to form new relations. The transformation procedure should be planned according to the well-being of older people and should also be sensitive

towards their interaction with their environments the way they used to. The 'age-friendly cities' approach developed by the World Health Organization which targets to create communities that include older people and that are supporting older people should be taken into consideration (WHO, 2007). These all emphasize the importance of the sustainability of older people's living environment. While the importance of person-environment relationships has been established there is a lack of serious application of this understanding in many urban renewal projects in modern Turkey.

Conclusion

The research states that in the transformed neighbourhoods the feeling of belonging and the informal relation network of older people weakens thus affecting the well-being of them negatively. Ng et al. (2004) argue for a human side to urban renewal that allows for a 'person-centred' approach that assists all people to make informed decisions on their future residential locations including the likely impacts on transitioning to changed lifestyles.

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