



Journey of Coronavirus in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) was first diagnosed in December 2019 in Wuhan in China. Despite the increasing case counts, the World Health Organization (WHO) listed it as a public health emergency on January 30, 2020. The first case in Turkey was detected in Istanbul on March 10, 2020. What is the effective factors in the late appearance of coronavirus in Turkey, and its quick spread in Turkey more than in many other countries? There may be many answers to this question. In this study, the geopolitical position of Turkey and its socio-cultural structure were evaluated in terms of the spread of coronavirus infection.

Reference Information

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Introduction

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) was first diagnosed in December 2019 in Wuhan in China (Ross et al., 2020: 1080; Kwon et al., 2020: 1; Verity et al., 2020: 669; Won et al., 2020: 107). Despite the increasing case counts, the World Health Organization (WHO) listed it as a public health emergency on January 30, 2020 (URL-8; Chena et al., 2020: 1). The first case in Turkey was detected in Istanbul on March 10, 2020. With the increasing number of cases and deaths, the WHO declared it as a pandemic when 118.000 cases were reported and 4.291 people died in 114 countries as of March 11 (URL-9).

The world turned into a fire area. The number of cases increased day by day, and there were 1.518.773 cases, 88.505 deaths and spread in 208 countries across the world as of April 8, 2020. The United States had the most cases with 435.128, and Italy had the highest number of deaths with 17.669. In addition, with 38226 cases and 812 deaths, Turkey ranked the 9th in the world in terms of coronavirus cases (URL-9).

Turkey neighbors eight countries that have very different characteristics (URL-4). However, it also has extensive communication with many world countries for reasons such as education and trade without neighborly relationships (URL-4). Also, it is difficult to maintain safe distance in social relations because of family structure, kinship relations, and belief system in Turkey (URL-3; Aslan, 2018).

Turkey has a multicultural structure that hosts different cultures (Özensel, 2013: 14). Also, hospitality is important in Turkish culture (Aslan, 2018:25). In Turkish culture, a guest is seen as sacred, and it is believed that serving the guest is a good deed (Toprak, 2019: 76). Greetings, shaking hands, hugging and



kissing guests are used as a show of respect (Keskin, 2017: 128). Kinship relations in Turkish culture are also given importance (Borodavchenko, 2018: 101). Kinship relationships are warm and friendly (Yılmaz ve Sarı, 2015:4). Relatives celebrate their joy and happiness together, and do weddings and funerals together (Aslan, 2018:22). Eids also have an important place in Turkish culture. An important tradition during the eids is visiting relatives and friends. Eid visits are an opportunity to visit the homes of the elderly, relatives, neighbors and acquaintances, sick people for being aware of each other and to renew friendships. Eid visits also cause that relatives who are cross with each other make peace and the hostilities end (Demirci, 2008: 45). It is considered that it is difficult to take protective measures because of traditions, customs and religious practices in Turkish culture.

The number of cases and deaths is increasing at a rapid pace in Turkey every day. The geopolitical position and socio-cultural structure of Turkey were evaluated in this paper in terms of the spread of coronavirus infection.

The Factors Effective in the Rapid Spread of Coronavirus in Turkey

Due to the family structure, kinship relations, and belief systems in Turkey, it is difficult to keep a safe distance in social relations (URL-3; Aslan, 2018). In addition, Turkey has neighbors with eight countries that have very different characteristics (URL-4). Furthermore, the intense communications with many world countries continue because of education and trade even if Turkey does not have any neighborhood relations with them (URL-4). What is the effect of these factors in the rapid spread of Coronavirus in Turkey? The new coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has taken over the world and has become the only agenda of all humanity. This is the last major epidemic we have experienced, but not the first. For example, it is estimated that approximately 50 million people died in the plague epidemic in the 14th century, known as 'Black Death' in the Spanish Flu Outbreak that began in 1918. Although it is unrealistic that events that took place generations ago affect individuals' psychology, we have many scientific findings that show that outbreaks experienced throughout history may have affected social structures and cultures deeply.

Turkey's Socio-Cultural Structure and Coronavirus

Turkey has a multicultural structure with different cultures (Özensel, 2013: 14). Also, hospitality is important in Turkish culture (Aslan, 2018:25). Hospitality is one of the important spiritual values in Turkish culture and Islamic religion. Turks try to welcome guests in the best way according to their customs, traditions, and habits (Toprak, 2019: 76). A guest is accepted as the guest of Allah, and is welcomed with respect (Aslan, 2018:25).

Hospitality and welcoming a guest, which are a legacy in Turkish culture and tradition, are identified with Turkish identity. Welcoming a guest is also important as well as hospitality in Turkish culture. It is part of Turkish hospitality to feed and drink a guest by using the facilities at hand. A guest is seen as sacred in Turkish culture, it is believed that welcoming and serving a guest is a good deed (Toprak, 2019: 76). Greeting, shaking hands, hugging and kissing guests are used as a show of respect (Keskin, 2017: 128). It is accepted that it is Sunnah to greet someone, and it is obligatory to receive it in the Islamic religion (Öztürk Kalkan, 2012: 78).

The concept of kinship exists in Turkish tradition, and the number of relatives can be plenty. Kinship relations are given importance in Turkish culture (Borodavchenko, 2018: 101). Kinship relations are very warm and friendly (Yılmaz ve Sarı, 2015: 4). Relatives celebrate their joy and happiness together, and do weddings and funerals together (Aslan, 2018:22). The Qur'an mentions kinship relations, and importance of visits to relatives is mentioned in Hadiths (Yılmaz ve Sarı, 2015: 3).

Also, an important tradition in Turkish culture during the eids is the visit of relatives and friends. Eid visits are an opportunity to visit the homes of the elderly, relatives, neighbors and acquaintances, sick people, to be aware of each other and to renew friendships. Eid visits also cause that those who are cross with each other end hostilities (Demirci, 2008: 45). During the eids, children usually kiss the hands of all



adults, and an adults kiss the hands of others they interact with if there is a large age difference between them, regardless of whether they have a kinship relation or not (Selçuk, 2005: 7). The reason for these visits is the national and religious qualities of the eids. It is also because eids are considered as a time for bonding, being together and a collective tradition (Demirci, 2008: 45).

Wedding ceremonies also have an important place in Turkish culture. General practices appear as asking for the bride, engagement, henna night, and wedding ceremony in wedding ceremonies (Ak, 2020: 18). Spouses, friends and relatives are invited to wedding ceremonies (Aslan, 2018: 40). Wedding ceremonies are crowded with people who dance local dances (Başbuğ, 2016: 15-24). Jewelry ceremonies are also held (Ak, 2020: 35). The purpose of the wedding is to declare the marriage of men and women to be valid and blessed in the eyes of the society (Ak, 2020: 1).

Prayers are important in the lives of Muslims (Avcı, 2017: 16). Eid prayers, funeral prayers, and Friday prayers are held with the congregation at the mosque (URL-5). Noon prayers are obligatory for Muslim men on Fridays. The person who does not go to noon prayers on Fridays three times is considered to have committed a great sin (URL-1). The situation of eid prayer varies as obligatory and Sunnah according to the sects (Avcı, 2017: 88). Funeral prayers are also considered obligatory. The Qur'an commanded to pray five times a day (Çetin, 2020: 34).

Death is also important in Turkish culture (Koçin, 2003: 135). The dead are washed, shrouded, and then buried (URL-5). Large crowds participate in funerals (Ersoy, 2016). The tradition of condolence after a death is one of the most important elements in Turkish culture. It is usually done in the house of the deceased after the burial. Neighbors, relatives and acquaintances gather in in the house of the deceased, offer their condolences, share the pain of the relatives of the deceased, and try to alleviate their sorrow (Koçin, 2003:144). Then, meals are served in the condolence house (Ersoy, 2016). After the burial, commemoration days are held, which can also be called as the three, seven, forty, hundred, and one year commemoration, following the death (Göde ve Tatlıcan, 2019: 119). This final duty for a Muslim soul is considered obligatory (URL-5).

A total of 99.2% of the people living in Turkey are Muslims (URL-7). Muslims can perform Umrah visits several times a year (URL-3). Firstly, it was determined that the outbreak starting in the Konya province of Anatolia originated from those coming from Umrah. It was determined that the pandemic spread especially from the people who came first and who were not quarantined in the dormitories and went into contact with people (Kızılkoyun, 2020). Filiz Ünal, Head of the Family Medicine Branch of Turkish Medical Association, stated that a person coming from Umrah to Konya spread Coronavirus to 257 people causing the deaths of five relatives, including his father, uncle and older sister (Selim Akyüz, 2020). In this way, the pandemic began to spread to Anatolia (Kızılkoyun, 2020). With the announcement made by the Ministry of Health on April 4, 2020, Konya ranked the 4th with 601 cases and 11 deaths in Turkey (URL-6). It is considered that it is difficult to take protective measures because of traditions, customs and religious practices in Turkish culture.

Turkey's Geopolitical Position and Coronavirus

Turkey, which is located at the closest point where Asia, Europe, and Africa meet, has been the home to many migrations throughout history with its geopolitical position. The migrations from neighboring countries to Turkey increase because Turkey has a common faith and culture with Muslim countries which are located in the east of Turkey, which experience civil wars, and because it is neighboring European countries (Çiçeksoğüt, 2017: 3). For this reason, as a result of internal turmoil in the Syrian Arab Republic in 2011, a total of 3.587.779 of Syrians left their country and are now living in Turkey (Çiçeksoğüt, 2017: 11; URL-2). It is considered that since it is difficult for Syrians to reach the healthcare system in economic terms and since they have low educational levels and live together collectively as a lifestyle, these factors will be effective in the spread of the virus (Balcılar, 2016).

Turkey hosted many migrations throughout history because of its neighborhood to Iraq (Çiçeksoğüt, 2017: 3). Iraq was occupied by the United States and Britain in 2003, and the civil war lasted for years



(Yaycı, 2019: 346). It is considered that crossing the border illegally was effective in the spread of the virus (Mohialdeen, 2019). Cases began to appear in Turkey due to migrations from Iraq to the Eastern and Southeastern parts of Turkey (Kızılkoyun, 2020). In addition, those coming from metropolitan cities also increased the number of cases in these regions (Kızılkoyun, 2020).

A large number of positive cases came from another neighboring country of Turkey, Iran, through the border gate in the province of Van, and caused an increase in cases in this city. In addition, there were many refugees who fled illegally after the border gates were closed; and a field hospital was established for them in the border (Kamer, 2020). Like Iraq, the immigration of those coming from Iran to the Eastern and Southeastern regions also contributed to the increase in the number of cases. In addition, those coming from metropolitan cities also increased the number of cases in these regions (Kızılkoyun, 2020).

Turkey is in a geopolitical position that experiences intensive travels due to education and trade with European countries (URL-4). For this reason, Coronavirus was first transferred to the provinces of Istanbul and Izmir with those coming from European countries. In Turkey, as of April 4, 2020, Istanbul ranked the 1st with 12231 cases and 210 deaths, and Izmir ranked the 2nd with 1105 cases and 27 deaths. Coronavirus continues to spread and increase at a fast pace because of Turkey's geopolitical position (URL-6).

The Spread of Coronavirus among Cities in Turkey

The disease was spread to 4-5 provinces with intercity travels from Istanbul mainly to Kocaeli and Ankara. As of April 4, 2020, Ankara ranked the 3rd with 860 cases, and Kocaeli ranked the 5th with 500 cases in Turkey with (URL-6).

The pandemic was transferred to the Black Sea Region with the expats arriving from European countries and those coming from other metropolitan cities, especially from Istanbul. In this way, it was determined across Turkey as of April 4, 2020, that Samsun ranked the 10th with 167 cases, and Zonguldak ranked the 4th with 12 deaths (URL-6). The pandemic spread with the arrival of people coming from European countries and with the closure of schools in metropolitan cities to the provinces of the Mediterranean, especially to Antalya (Kızılkoyun, 2020).

The geopolitical and socio-cultural structure of Turkey was effective in the rapid spread of Coronavirus. These conclusions were made by determining from which provinces the spread started based on the statements of people who had Coronavirus (Kızılkoyun, 2020).

Turkey ranked the 9th in the world as of April 8, 2020, in terms of the number of cases with 38226 Coronavirus cases and 812 deaths (URL-9). In this respect, Istanbul was the first among other provinces, followed by Izmir as the second city, and Ankara the third. Today, Coronavirus cases are continuing to increase rapidly in Turkey due to its geopolitical and socio-cultural structure (URL-6). It is considered that life-threatening events, such as epidemics, have tightened the cultures of societies, causing them to attach more tightly to their norms.

Result

Coronavirus is growing and spreading in a fast manner in the whole world. We believe that the fast spread of the disease in Turkey despite its late arrival may be due to its geopolitical location and socio-cultural structure. In addition, it is also possible that Turkish culture is hospitable and shows respect for body language like shaking hands, hugs, and kissing hands, and ceremonies like weddings and funerals make it difficult to keep the accurate social distance and cause more spread of the pandemic. It can be recommended that individuals must be made to become more conscious of social distance. To prevent the epidemic in Turkey, it may be recommended to raise more awareness for people, increase protective measures, raise awareness about social distance, ensure that travels among all provinces in Turkey are provided with controls, and if necessary, impose curfews on weekends and to speed up treatment efforts.



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