

Community Centers of Local Governments for Retirees: The Case of Istanbul

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Abstract

The population of Turkey is aging. When local governments increase the quantity and quality of services for older people, the social welfare of older people increases as well. Among the special services for older people in the local administrations, community centers come first. This study examines the quality and diversity of services in community centers. In addition, the contribution of these centers to the activeness of older people living in the city is examined. In 2018, a cross-sectional survey was conducted in January and February, and a questionnaire was applied to 269 participants aged 55 years and older in the districts of Istanbul; Kadıköy, Maltepe, Üsküdar, Tuzla, Beşiktaş and Şişli. Research data were analyzed with the help of the SPSS 21 (2012) program. According to the results of the analysis, 42.7% of the participants were single individuals and 15.1% of the participants were living alone at home. While 63.9% of the participants stated that they do sports, 70.3% of those who do sports said that this activity was "walking". The most of the participants (44.2%) stated that they participated in the social activities of these centers. As the reason for the participants' using the community center, 68% of the participants chose the option of meeting with their friends, 52% chose to have new friendships, 48.3% of them chose the option of eliminating their loneliness. The 65-74 age group who use the community center are doing more regular sports than the ones aged 75 and over $\chi^2 = 6.851, p = 3.30e-02$. Women who use the community center do more regular sports than men $\chi^2 = 11.423; p = 1.00e-03$. It could be said that the community centers are important alternative public spaces in the city, especially for older people living alone.

Keywords: Active aging, community center, urbanization, social policy, local administrations

Key Practitioners Message

- Community centers of local governments could contribute to the activity of older people.
- It is important to make regular sports for the older person.
- Regular physical activity may vary according to gender.

Introduction

The population is getting older depending on the developments in technology and health (Turner & Tatlıcan, 2011). It is estimated that the number of individuals over 60 years of age will reach 2 billion by 2050 (UN DESA, 2015). As is the general

trend in the world, the proportion of older people in the population is increasing in Turkey. It is assumed that the ratio of the population over 65 years of age, which is 8.5% in 2018, will exceed 12% in 2030 and 20% in 2050 (UN DESA, 2015). It is estimated that life expectancy, which was 54

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years for women and 51 years for men in the 1960s, will increase to 74 years for women and 79 for men in 2030 (EYH, 2013, p. 9). According to TURKSTAT (2016), the number of seniors 65 and over in Turkey is 6.651.503. It is thought that the proportion of older people in Turkey will reach a critical amount both economically and socially, as in developed countries, in the short period of thirty years.

The senior population in Turkey is estimated to be living mainly in cities and will especially live in big cities in the future (Kurtkapan, 2018). Active living in a safe environment is important for older people (Şentürk & Altan, 2015). It could be said that local government services contribute to the activeness of older people living in cities. The community centers that the local administrations have allocated for the use of seniors are considered to accomplish this.

In the literature, there is an activity theory that explains both the individual and social importance of productivity during old age. According to this theory, seniors tend to continue their activity as long as their physical conditions allow it (Achenbaum & Weiland, 1996; Cockerham, 1991). This is necessary to overcome many problems in old age (Powell, 2006; Victor, 2005).

The concept of active old age that emerged since the early 1990s examines sports, participation in labor force, and social, economic and cultural events (Kalinkara, 2013). The World Health Organization focuses on old age and emphasizes the active old age concept, which includes the message of healthy aging and more social participation. It is stated that active old age increases the quality of life of seniors and maximizes opportunities for social security (Baran & Bahar-Özvarış, 2012; Görgün-Baran & Kurnaz, 2013; Yalçın, 2013). Active aging, which includes living in the highest quality and an increased lifespan, consists of the individual being active and maintaining their relationships and roles in society (Aydiner Boylu, 2013).

What can be done for older people in Turkey is an important part of social policy. Creating an environment where seniors could live actively is

becoming a top priority. This is demonstrated in that local administrations allocate places specifically for seniors, and social and cultural activities in these places make some of the older people more social. Social connections, such as frequent participation in social activities, is good for cognitive ability in older people (Zunzunegui et al, 2003). Also, these activities help to reduce social isolation (Toepoel, 2012).

Methods

This study investigated the activities of the districts' local administrations in Istanbul in terms of community centers they have opened for older people. The research was conducted in the Kadıköy, Üsküdar, Beşiktaş, Maltepe, Şişli and Tuzla districts.

Participants

The study was carried out with 269 participants, using a cross-sectional design. The questionnaire form contains personal and demographic information. Data collection was done following face to face interview models. Interviewees consisted of men and women aged 55 and over.

Procedure

The research was carried out in two stages. In the first stage, the questionnaire was developed as a result of the literature survey, and the questionnaire was finalized after the pilot interviews and expert opinion. Participants were contacted from January to February of 2018 at the community centers of local administrations in Istanbul. The ethics committee approval which was received from Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University for conducting the research is available with the ethics committee report number is 04.01.2018/01, and research permits were obtained from the relevant local governments. During the interviews, the participants were also informed, and their approval was obtained. The aim of the study was to examine the activities of the local administrations' community centers. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to evaluate the data. The IBM SPSS 21 (2012) program was used for statistical analysis.

Results

This section includes analysis of data obtained from the questionnaire taken by individuals over 55 years of age. Firstly, the demographic characteristics of the participants were examined. Secondly, whether the participants do sports was evaluated. Thirdly, the reasons for the participants using the community center and the activities they participated in there were evaluated. Finally, findings determine whether the participants' regular sports are dependent on gender and age variables or not by using a chi-square test.

As can be seen in [Table-1](#), the majority of the participants are female (N = 134, 49.4%). The majority of the participants are 65-74 years old (N = 116, 43.1%). 55-64 years old (N = 90, 33.5%), and (N = 63, 23.4%) are aged 75 years and over. Most of the participants (N = 115, 42.7%) were single individuals. The rate of older people living alone at home is (N = 41, 15.1%).

Table-1. Personal characteristics of participants

| Variables | f | (%) |
|----------------------------|------------|-------|
| Gender | | |
| Female | 134 | 49.8% |
| Male | 139 | 50.2% |
| Age | | |
| 55-64 | 90 | 33.5% |
| 65-74 | 116 | 43.1% |
| 75+ | 63 | 23.4% |
| Marital Status | | |
| Married | 153 | 56.9% |
| Single | 115 | 42.7% |
| No answer | 1 | 0.4% |
| Number of Residents | | |
| Alone | 41 | 15.2% |
| 2 Individuals | 99 | 36.8% |
| 3-4 Individuals | 95 | 35.3% |
| 5 and over | 23 | 8.6% |
| No answer | 11 | 4.1% |
| Total | 269 | |

Note-1. f = Frequency

Community centers are places that local governments open for older people. Older people chat there and organize events. They engage in various social and cultural activities. The older people establish new friendships, eliminate loneliness, and socialize by participating in activities. These centers have a positive impact on the active participation of older people. Therefore, these centers should be expanded at the neighborhood level. In these centers, various activities, especially sports, should be increased.

As could be seen in [Table-2](#), 63.9% of the research participants do regular sports, 70.3% of them do regularly walking, and 18.1% of them do regularly swim or used fitness equipment.

Table-2. Participants' regular sports status

| | |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| Do you do sports? | f |
| Yes | 172 |
| No | 83 |
| No answer | 14 |
| Total | 269 |
| What kind of sports do you do? | |
| Walking | 121 |
| Swimming | 25 |
| Fitness equipment | 6 |
| Other | 20 |
| Total | 172 |

Note-1. f = Frequency

As could be seen in [Table-3](#), participants' reasons for using the community center are as follows: 183 (68%) chose to meet with friends; 142 (52.8%) chose to participate in activities; 140 (52%) chose to make new friends; 130 (48.3%) chose to eliminate loneliness; 121 (45%) chose to talk about current issues; and 94 (34.9%) chose to share their problems with others.

Table-3. Frequency and percentage values for the question of the reason for using the community center (N = 269)

| | Eliminating loneliness | | Meeting with friends | | Talking about current issues | | Sharing problems | | Making new friends | | Participating in activities | | Play games (card games) | | Sports | |
|-----------|------------------------|------|----------------------|------|------------------------------|----|------------------|------|--------------------|----|-----------------------------|------|-------------------------|------|--------|------|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| Yes | 130 | 48.3 | 183 | 68.0 | 121 | 45 | 94 | 34.9 | 140 | 52 | 142 | 52.8 | 39 | 14.5 | 39 | 14.5 |
| No | 139 | 51.7 | 86 | 32.0 | 148 | 55 | 175 | 65.1 | 129 | 48 | 127 | 47.8 | 210 | 78.1 | 184 | 68.4 |
| No answer | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 20 | 7.4 | 46 | 17.1 |

Note-1. f = Frequency

As can be seen in Table-4, the most selected option for the question of the activities participants participate in is the social activities option. This is demonstrated in that 119 (44.2%) of the participants stated that they participate in social activities, while 89 (33.1%) of them participate in train-

en who use the community center do sport more regularly than men.

As can be seen in the Table-6, the correlation between the variables was found to be statistically significant $\chi^2 = 6.851, p = 3.30e-02$. The 65-74 age group who use the community center are doing

Table-4. Frequency and percentage values for the question of activities older people participate in the community center (N = 269)

| | Health activities | | Training activities | | Cultural activities | | Social activities | | Chat activities | | Volunteering activities | | Donation activities | | Other activities | |
|-----|-------------------|------|---------------------|------|---------------------|------|-------------------|------|-----------------|------|-------------------------|------|---------------------|----|------------------|------|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| Yes | 76 | 28.3 | 89 | 33.1 | 69 | 25.7 | 119 | 44.2 | 63 | 23.4 | 41 | 15.2 | 35 | 13 | 23 | 8.6 |
| No | 193 | 71.7 | 180 | 66.9 | 200 | 74.3 | 150 | 55.8 | 206 | 76.6 | 228 | 84.8 | 234 | 87 | 246 | 91.4 |

Note-1. f = Frequency

ing activities, 76 (28.3%) of them participate in health activities, 69 (25.7%) of them participate in cultural activities, and 63 (23.4%) of them participate in chat activities in these centers.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between gender and regular sports. As can be seen, by the frequencies cross-tabulated in Table-5, there is a highly significant relationship between gender and doing regular sports $\chi^2 = 11.423; p = 1.00e-03$. Wom-

more regular sports than the ones aged 75 and over.

Discussion

Cities have many advantages for older people, but they also have some problems. Seniors living in the city are increasingly isolated from social life and in turn their activity decreases (Moody & Sasser, 2012; Victor, 2005; Weeks, 1984). Increasing

Table-5. Chi-square test results to determine whether or not regular sports are dependent on gender variables

| | Female | Gender | | Total | χ^2 | df | P |
|---------------|--------|----------------|---------------|-------|----------|----|----------|
| | | Male | | | | | |
| Regular Sport | Yes | 101 (88.36) | 71 (83.64) | 172 | 11.423 | 1 | 1.00e-03 |
| | No | 30 (42.64) | 53 (40.36) | 83 | | | |
| | Total | 131 | 124 | | | | |

Note-1. Expected values are shown in parentheses.

Table-6. Chi-square test results to determine whether or not regular sports are dependent on age variables

| | 55-64 | Age Group | | Total | χ^2 | df | p |
|---------------|-------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------|----|----------|
| | | 65-74 | 75+ | | | | |
| Regular Sport | Yes | 59 (59.4) | 80 (72.2) | 33 (40.5) | 6.851 | 2 | 3.30e-02 |
| | No | 29 (28.6) | 27 (34.8) | 27 (19.5) | | | |
| | Total | 88 | 107 | 60 | | | |

Note-1. Expected values are shown in parentheses.

isolation in big cities affects most older people of all age groups (Görgün-Baran, 2012). Loneliness in urban life where isolation is increasing constitutes an important issue to be addressed for seniors. The existence of seniors who do not leave their homes due to various reasons in today's cities is a fact of life. Local governments are responsible for reducing anxiety in some of these seniors and opening reliable places in areas where they will go.

It could be said that some of the community centers in the five districts of the study have an important place in the activity of seniors living in the city. It cannot be said that the community centers respond to all the needs of the seniors, but these centers are an important alternative public space as much as the park and tea gardens in the city, especially for seniors living alone. Seniors come to these centers and chat at certain times of the day. It is stated that seniors who do not often leave the house in their old age can get out of the house at certain times of the week through artistic activities in the community centers. New friendships are established and some of these friendships have even reached a point where two friends' grandchildren have gotten married (Kurtkapan, 2018). These centers are able to offer opportunities for older people to communicate with their peers.

As a result of resources, the correlation between the variables was found to be statistically significant $\chi^2 = 6.851$, $p = 3.30e-02$. The 65-74 age group who use the community center are doing more regular sports than the ones aged 75 and over. The correlation between these variables was found statistically significant $\chi^2 = 11.423$; $p = 1.00e-03$. For example, women who use the com-

munity center do so more regularly than men.

The most selected option to the question of the activities participants participate in in the community center is the social activities option. Of the participants, 119 (44.2%) stated that they participate in the social activities, 89 (33.1%) of them participate in the training activities, 76 (28.3%) of them participate in the health activities, 69 (25.7%) of them participate in cultural activities, and 63 (23.4%) of them participate in chat activities in these centers.

Participants' aims of using the community center are as follows: 183 (68%) chose to meet with friends; 142 (52.8%) chose to participate in activities; 140 (52%) chose to make new friends; 130 (48.3%) chose to eliminate loneliness; 121 (45%) chose to talk about current issues; and 94 (34.9%) chose to share problems.

The senior center supports successful aging by maintaining older peoples' mental and physical health (Dal Santo, 2009). The community centers' activities improve physical function in older adults (Fitzpatrick, et al., 2008). Based on the current research findings, it is suggested that future research should focus on highlighting the need of older people living in the city and on the role of community centers in fulfilling the need of this group of people of the community.

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