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Elderly People Volunteering in Long-Term Care Facilities In Izmir, Turkey

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Elderly People Volunteering in Long-Term Care Facilities In Izmir, Turkey

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ÖZET

Gönüllülük gibi sosyal yaşama katılım, sosyal hayatın içinde olma ve toplumsallaşma, yaşlıların yaşam kalitesi için çok önemli bir faaliyet olarak görülmektedir. Türkiye'de emeklilik sonrasında yaşlıların kamusal gönüllülük faaliyetlerinde ne ölçüde yer aldığına ilişkin veriler oldukça yetersizdir. Gelişmiş ve gelişmekte olan toplumlarda nüfusun yaşlanması ile birlikte uzun süreli bakım işgücüne talebin artacağına yanısıra sosyal katılım ve gönüllülük yoluyla bakım hizmeti verenlerin de yaşam kalitesinin yükseldiğine ilişkin kanıtlar giderek artmaktadır. Bu çalışma, İzmir'de kamuya ve özel kuruluşlara ait bakımevlerindeki gönüllü çalışmaların mevcudiyetini tesbit etmenin yanısıra 60 yaş üstündeki bireylerin bu kurumlarda gönüllülük faaliyetlerinde ne ölçüde yer aldıklarını belirlemeye yöneliktir. Çalışma bulguları, İzmir'deki bakımevlerinde gönüllü çalışmaların yetersiz olduğu ve yaşlıların bakımevlerinde gönüllü olarak çalışmalara büyük oranda ilgi göstermediklerini göstermektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Toplumsal katılım, gönüllülük, uzun süreli bakım, Türkiye

ABSTRACT

Social inclusion and participation, including civic engagements such as volunteering, can be regarded as an important factor in quality of life of individuals particularly among older people. In the context of longer post retirement years in Turkey, there is a general lack of public activities available for older people. While the nature of contemporary demographic changes signal an increasing demand for long-term care (LTC) workforce there is also emerging evidence that quality of life can be enhanced for caregivers through volunteering and social involvement. The current study reports on research aimed to determine within the city of Izmir in Turkey: 1) the extent of voluntary work in for profit as well as non-profit residential LTC facilities, and 2) levels of participation of older people (60+) as volunteers in LTC facilities. The findings indicate that nearly 10 percent of Izmir LTC facilities benefits from older peoples voluntary work.

Keywords: Civic participation, volunteering, long-term care, Turkey

INTRODUCTION

Volunteering is a cornerstone of civic engagement and a key element of social capital, which can be particularly important after retirement (Putnam, 2000). Volunteering in general is defined as taking responsibility for actions towards a person or community in an unpaid capacity, and spending time and effort without any profit (GHK, 2010:49; European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions [Eurofound], 2011). Formal volunteering is the voluntary activity carried out within an institutional structure for the benefit of others, while informal volunteering is the help and service that is performed for the benefit of family, friends or neighbors without the participation of any formal organization (Baines, Hardil & Wilson, 2011). Formal volunteering is usually defined as 'highly active' civic engagement, in comparison to 'modest participation' such as contacting a local councilor or belonging to a social club. However, the concept of volunteering is extremely multifaceted and heterogeneous and there is no uniform definition.

Within the context of growing demand for long term care across the world, volunteers can play an important, and otherwise unavailable, role in such services. Within a usually tight schedule of activities and over-loaded workforce, volunteers may be able to have the 'luxury of time' (Damianakis et al., 2007; Musson et al., 1997) with positive consequences on service users' moods and quality of life (Falkowski, 2013; Van der Ploeg et al., 2012). While volunteers within LTC contribute to both for-profit and non--profit organisations, they are significantly more present in the latter group (Falkowski, 2013; Hussein & Manthorpe, 2012).

This article reports on a research project aimed at establishing the contribution of volunteers, particularly of relatively older age groups (60 years or older), in voluntary organizations providing different long-term care services in Izmir, Turkey. The article starts by discussing the values and challenges in old-age volunteering, then sets the context of

volunteering in Turkey with a specific focus on long term care provision. We focus on the city of Izmir where the proportion of the population over the age of 65 is 9 percent, which is higher than the Turkey average of 7 percent (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu-Turkish Statistical Institute [TUIK], 2010). Within Izmir, some districts such as Karaburun, Karşıyaka and Konak this percentage is between 15 and 19 percent (TUIK, 2010). Izmir is an important province in terms of the number of residential aged care homes: it contains approximately 15 percent of the total number of residential aged care homes from Turkey (Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığı- Ministry of Family and Social Policies [MFSP], 2011).

Voluntary Organisations and Volunteering in Turkey

In Turkey, like in many other countries, voluntary organizations make significant contributions to the development of public social services, which is the state's basic responsibility (Özalp, 2008; Türkiye Üçüncü Sektör Vakfı- Turkey Third Sector Foundation [TÜSEV], 2011). They are perceived to strengthen social bonds, provide access to health and social care services and support individuals in need of care ([TÜSEV], 2006; Borell & Gerdner, 2011). Historically, concepts of volunteering and civil society in Turkey has been revitalized as a result of several internal and external factors, especially in the post-1980 era, and has gained prominence in academic, social and political discourse (Icduygu, Meydanoglu & Sert. 2011). The development of the voluntary sector gained particular momentum following the aftermath of the Cold War and within the context of heavy globalization (Icduygu et al., 2011). A number of developments that were inherited from the late 1990s shaped the dynamics of civil society in the millennium. The first such milestone came in the form of the 1999 Marmara earthquakes. These disasters mobilized voluntary groups and non-governmental organizations and increased society's interest and trust in civil society as citizens participated through volunteering and

donations. And these played significant roles in the transformation of civil society in Turkey (Yeğen, Keyman, Çalışkan & Tol, 2010; Icduygu, Meydanoglu, Sert, 2011), with around 65 percent of all voluntary organizations in Turkey focus on social services' activities (Icduygu et al., 2011).

However, the concept of active and formal volunteering appears to be under-developed in Turkey for several reasons. Firstly, formal volunteering is not widely accepted in the structure of social perception and thinking within the Turkish society (Özel Sektör Gönüllüler Derneği- Corporate Volunteer Association [OSGD], 2006). Secondly, public opinion of mistrusting the purpose of volunteering is evident in Turkey and may relate to a wider lack of confidence in non-governmental organizations (TÜSEV, 2006: 119; Pires, Prouteau & Sardinha, 2010). Some groups are perceived to be (mis)using charitable institutions to carry out their political and ideological agendas and this may give rise to suspicious attitudes to voluntary organizations in general and may negatively affect the development of volunteering (TÜSEV, 2006). Other possible reasons for the low uptake of formal volunteering in Turkey may relate to the reduction and/or delay of transfer of appropriate resources between organizations and their effective use due to bureaucratic obstacles and financial problems (Yildirim & Yildirim, 2011). These individual and structural barriers are topped up with some inadequacies of the national policy and regulations in relation to service provision at state and local levels in Turkey (Araştırma ve Etütler Merkezi [AREM], 2008, Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı- Turkish State Planning Organisation [DPT], 2007). On the individual level, lack of time and low perception of associated rewards have been shown to be significant barriers to volunteering (Yildirim & Yildirim, 2011).

Volunteering After Retirement

With increased life expectancy across the globe, many countries have adopted some form of aging policies, some are more established and well developed than others,

but most place emphasis on the overall well-being and independence of older people (OECD, 2011). As part of such independence and active aging, volunteering after retirement can be viewed as a winning strategy to enhance people lives and maximize their contribution to the society. For example, in the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK), the contribution of volunteers in providing long-term care is gaining increasing attention (Falkowski, 2013; Hussein & Manthorpe, 2012). Early religious and philanthropic efforts led to a flourishing voluntary sector in many developed and developing countries focused in the majority in providing welfare services (GHK, 2010). At the same time, the voluntary sector, which attracts most volunteers, has long been an important provider of care services in many countries (Knapp, Koutsogeorgopoulou & Smith, 1996). In most economically developed countries, the majority of volunteers offer their services to non-profit or voluntary organisations, mostly undertaking human services work (Wilson et al. 2005; Butler & Eckart 2007).

In recent years, research on the social dimensions of health such as social integration, social network and support have been gaining great momentum due to the associated demands of aging and long-term care needs. There is also increasing recognition of health and social value of regular engagement in socially meaningful activities, especially for older people. Studies have shown that volunteering for some older people represents important means for undertaking productive activity in older age with consequent benefits that include enhanced quality of life, reduction in stress and depression levels and improved self-confidence (Lum & Lightfoot, 2005; Dykstra, 2009; Stanley et al, 2010).

Loneliness and exclusion from mainstream community life are frequent social problems in old age in many countries including Turkey (Tilvis et al, 2011; Stanley et al, 2010; Dykstra, 2009) with strong relationship between loneliness and entry to a nursing home or residential aged care facility in later life. Voluntary work can be an effective tool

contributing to the social inclusion of older people and may in some circumstances prevent or delay their need for future older people residential care (Bluth, 2010; Eurofound, 2010; Tang, Morrow-Howell & Hong, 2009). Thus, older-age volunteering in service sectors such as long-term aged care offers a 'virtuous circle' of benefits (Pennix, 2006; Hussein & Manthorpe, 2012).

Due to cultural and historical differences, formal volunteering (of all age groups) varies across the countries of the European Union (EU). The "European Social Reality" survey (Eurobarometer (2007) shows that Austria, the Netherlands and Sweden are the countries where people volunteer the most; with 60, 55 and 53 per cent of people aged 16 or more volunteering respectively (GHK, 2010; Pires, Prouteau & Sardinha, 2010). The survey from Eurofound (2011) showed that in the EU, especially in the UK, Belgium, Denmark, Germany and Spain, participation of the elderly in volunteering is increasing and approximately 3 out of 10 adults are engaged in some type of organized voluntary work. In the USA older people have been more engaged in voluntary work in recent years than in the past, especially in the area of social services (Gottlieb & Gillespie, 2008; Tang *et al.*, 2009).

In Turkey, according to YADA survey (2012), the majority of voluntary organizations' members are men, with 16.4 percent over the age of 50 (Yeğen, Keyman, Çalışkan, Tol, 2010). Overall volunteering activities in Turkey are considerably low, with only 2.5% and 4.2% provide volunteer support to social or political organisations. Donations to NGOs are also low in Turkey: according to an international study, only 14% of the public have made a financial donation to a NGO within the last month. The same study places Turkey 134th out of 153 in terms of donations, volunteerism and helping a stranger. According to the Icduygu, Meydanoglu, Sert (2011) study from various regions of Turkey "*the number of youth under 25 years, elderly individuals 65 and over and women who are involved in voluntary organizations is almost zero or far less than required*".

Aims of the Study

In the scope of the "European Year of Volunteering" (2011), the focus of this study is on the city of Izmir with the objectives to 1) determine contribution of volunteers in for-profit and not-for-profit residential aged care homes in Izmir, Turkey and 2) investigate the extent of participation of elderly people in residential aged care homes as volunteers. In particular, the research study attempted to address the following two questions:

1. Is there an organizational structure or support framework for encouraging volunteer work in residential aged care homes operating in Izmir?
2. What percentage of volunteering in residential aged care homes is undertaken by people 60 and over?

Context and Methods:

Izmir is a port city situated in western Turkey on the gulf of Izmir, with a population of nearly four million. It is a center of trade and tourism and is Turkey's third largest city in terms of economic development. Mostly due to favorable climate and high quality of life it is one of the places strongly preferred by elderly and retired people.

This study is a descriptive and cross-sectional field study and covers state, municipal, foundation as well as private residential aged care homes operating within the borders of the Izmir Province and aims to determine the extent of volunteers and voluntary work in those institutions. There are a total of 41 residential care homes in Izmir that are either run by state, municipal, foundation or for-profit organizations, the focus of this research is on these 41 residential care homes. This study was conducted under the leadership of Narlidere District Governorship between the 14th of April and 30th of May of 2011. Data were collected by contacting all residential care homes and through written and telephone interviews. Interviews with operational managers of these institutions collected information on the presence and numbers of volunteers, detailed information on their

profile, years of service and their roles in the organization. All residential care homes in İzmir responded to either a postal or phone questionnaire, thus the study had a response rate of 100%.

FINDINGS

Table 1 provides the distribution of participating residential aged care, 68 percent

are voluntary not-for-profit organization, 15 percent are state owned, 10 percent foundation and 3 percent belong to municipalities. While only 15 percent of residential aged care homes are owned by the state, a total of 54 percent of total number of beds are funded by the state. However, for profit-organizations own only one fifth of the share in terms of the bed capacity.

Table 1: Distribution of the number of residential care homes and volunteers based on the institutions (2011)

| INSTITUTION THAT RUNS THE RESIDENTIAL CARE HOMES | NUMBER OF RESIDENTIAL CARE HOMES | | NUMBER OF BEDS | | THE RESIDENTIAL CARE WITH VOLUNTEER | | THE RESIDENTIAL CARE WITHOUT VOLUNTEER | |
|--|----------------------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|--|--------------|
| | Number | % | Number | % | N | % | N | % |
| STATE (publicly-run) | 6 | 14.63 | 1941 | 53.74 | 3 | 50.0 | 3 | 50.0 |
| MUNICIPALITY | 3 | 2.19 | 414 | 11.46 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 100.0 |
| FOUNDATION | 4 | 9.78 | 539 | 14.92 | 1 | 25.0 | 3 | 75.0 |
| PRIVATE (for-profit) | 28 | 68.29 | 718 | 19.88 | 0 | 0 | 28 | 100.0 |
| TOTAL | 41 | 100.0 | 3612 | 100.0 | 4 | 9.76 | 37 | 90.24 |

Table 1 indicates that 37 residential aged care homes (90%) did not report having any volunteer workers. None of the for-profit and municipal residential aged care homes reported any volunteer workers. Among four residential aged care homes (10%) that had volunteers, three were state owned while one belonged to a foundation residential aged care facility. Low number of volunteers may reflect the reality of the contribution of volunteers or may be due to not reporting of some volunteers, especially those who contribute in an irregular pattern or due to the nature of volunteers' contribution. However, the low

reported contribution of volunteers in formal long-term care settings is consistent with other research from the United Kingdom (Hussein, 2011).

Table 2 lists the number of workers in the residential aged care homes that had voluntary work. The total number of volunteers in those institutions was 75. Only one residential aged care home had volunteer workers for seventeen years, one had a volunteer program for five years and the other two residential aged care homes have been having volunteers for only one year.

Table 2: Number of volunteer workers in residential care homes that allow voluntary work and time since allowing the volunteer work

| RESIDENTIAL CARE HOMES WITH VOLUNTEER | Number of Volunteers | Work Time (Years) |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------|
| STATE | 50 | 1 |
| STATE | 11 | 17 |
| STATE | 8 | 1 |
| FOUNDATION | 6 | 5 |
| TOTAL | 75 | |

Table 3 shows that the age group of 18-29 year olds has the highest rate of participation in voluntary work with 68%. The age group of 46-60 years had 18.67% of participants, while for the age group of above 61 years this was

only 5.53%. Volunteers were engaged in activities such as choir, music, painting, artistic activities, reading, chatting, and sports rather than the services related to activities of daily living (ADLs).

Table 3: Age Distribution of Volunteers

| Age | Number | % |
|--------------|-----------|--------------|
| 18-29 | 51 | 68.0 |
| 30-44 | 6 | 8.0 |
| 45-60 | 14 | 18.67 |
| 61 and + | 4 | 5.33 |
| TOTAL | 75 | 100.0 |

Discussion

This study aimed to determine the extent and status of voluntary work and participation of elderly people in voluntary work in Izmir residential aged care homes owned by the state, municipalities, foundations and private owned organizations. The results obtained by this study indicate that volunteering is not an integral component of the infrastructure in residential aged care homes operating in Izmir. In the residential aged care homes where voluntary work takes place, those activities are entirely at the initiative of the institution and are limited solely to cultural activities. However, they are integral component of the infrastructure. Apart from several sincere voluntary workers in some residential aged care homes, it can be said there are almost no attempts in the area of volunteering and that a lot of ground still needs to be covered. However, such initiatives as letting the volunteer old people benefit from tax reduction, allowing priority for participation in some entertainment and social activities and tax deductions, introduction of incentive systems in transportation should be materialized.

In particular, lack of volunteers and any voluntary work in private owned residential aged care homes could be seen as indications of insufficient public awareness and participation despite the presence of legislation to boost volunteering. Social education, from as young as primary and secondary schooling, should be designed so as to relate the benefits of participating in volunteering activities for one-self in later ages and thus increase the awareness of positive rewards associated with volunteering activities. On the other hand, it will be very beneficial if the infrastructure of social care institutions is reviewed in terms of extending volunteering and maintaining its sustainability introducing reward/incentive practices within the scope of existing arrangements.

The fact that older people, however small in number, are contributing their time and efforts in residential aged care homes on a volunteer basis indicates the potential of developing a

systematic way of encouraging and facilitating voluntary initiatives with the long term care sector. The findings indicate that the uptake of volunteering activities by older groups is relatively low, such age group differences are similar to studies (Yildirim & Yildirim, 2011; TEGV, 2008; Palaz & Boz, 2008; Icduygu, Meydanoglu & Sert, 2011). There are limited studies and programs related to young people's voluntary work for elderly care to examine the extent of these age-group differences. However, previous research in Turkey by Hablemitoğlu and colleagues (2011:159) stated that '*young people's voluntary services for the elderly have great importance for people in elderly care centres with major spiritual value to these services*'.

While the majority of existing volunteers might be individuals from young age groups, individuals 60 years of age and over in this study have shown some interest in voluntary works in domains where they can relate to the service provided and those receiving such services as the case in long term care settings. Higher volunteering participation rates of younger age groups could be explained on economic reasons, volunteering can be viewed as means to enter the labor market. However, one could also argue that this is due to the fact that such a practice, of volunteering at old age, is not a well-grounded tradition in contemporary Turkish culture. Izmir's elderly population is above Turkey's average and the number of residential aged care homes is more than any other city in the country. The result of our study is important in two ways: first, despite the presence of legislation to encourage and to develop volunteering, 90 percent of the residential aged care homes lack infrastructural support for attracting and holding volunteer workers. Secondly, in the residential aged care homes that have opportunities for voluntary work, older retired people are not actively participating in existing activity programs.

In addition, the result of this study showed the need for further research on internal and external factors relevant for attracting more volunteers for elderly care, particularly among

older retired persons. It is perhaps important to understand that older volunteers have the potential to play a crucial role in the overall care of older people living in residential aged care facilities throughout Turkey. Effective inclusion of older volunteers will require appropriate training, support and supervision in order to ensure that the service they provide is valued by residents, staff and family members. Equally important is the need for older volunteers to feel that their respective roles are valued and fit within the overall framework of quality care. In this way, volunteerism placed in an appropriate structural framework can be an effective means for utilizing the talents and skills of older retired people as well as providing an effective means for combating loneliness and social exclusion. Both the state and NGOs have a great responsibility to prepare legal infrastructure appropriate for Turkey's socio-cultural structure and to carry out systematic studies directed to increase the social awareness of the value related to engagement in formal volunteer work. Their responsibility also includes encouraging older people to volunteer in social care institutions, through structured incentives and/or promoting the value of such activities. In this respect, supporting voluntary organizations that provide participation of the elderly in the community offering an opportunity to fulfill their potential will benefit retirees and healthy elderly people along with contributing to the resolution of regional and national challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a broad perspective on the presence of voluntary work in Izmir residential aged care homes and the extent of participation of elderly people in those residential settings. These results represent a preliminary excursion in older person volunteer work and are not sufficient to interpret the nationwide status of formal voluntary work by older people. Given the current situation, of aging population and associated needs, more comprehensive and large-scale research is needed to assess the participation of elderly people in volunteering.

In EU member countries the volunteer projects especially designed for social care services for elderly people greatly contributed to improving the quality of life and social participation of elderly people. In this context, "*European Year of Volunteering 2011*" and "*European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, 2012*" are great opportunities to develop incentive systems that provide support for voluntary organizations and volunteers in Izmir. Moreover, there are major potential to strengthen the social participation of elderly people, to promote a healthy and active aging population, and to encourage the adoption of a lifelong learning concept, where the more developed countries' solutions for good practice can be used as a guideline.

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