

# THE PERCEPTIONS OF AGING AMONG IRANIAN MIGRANTS: EVIDENCE FROM NEVSEHIR, TURKEY

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COBISS: 1.01

## ABSTRACT

### **The Perceptions of Aging among Iranian Migrants: Evidence from Nevsehir, Turkey**

The paper looks at perceptions of aging among elderly Iranian migrants in Nevsehir, Turkey. The author explores how socioeconomic and cultural factors and the transit migrant status of these migrants affect their perceptions of aging. The study used a semi-structured questionnaire to conduct in-depth interviews. It suggests that wage discrimination plays a significant role in determining the respondents' perceptions of aging due to the lack of official work permits for Iranian migrants. It also explores how the transit migrant status of elderly Iranian migrants and the uncertainty of their stay in Turkey restrict their social networks and access to social protection, sharply shaping their perceptions of aging.

**KEYWORDS:** perception, elderly Iranian migrant, transit migration, aging, Turkey

## IZVLEČEK

### **Percepcije staranja med iranskimi migranti: primer turške pokrajine Nevsehir**

Članek obravnava percepcije staranja med starejšimi migranti v pokrajini Nevsehir v Turčiji. Avtor raziskuje, kako družbenoekonomski in kulturni dejavniki ter status tranzitnih migrantov vplivajo na njihovo dožemanje staranja. V študiji je bil za izvedbo poglobljenih intervjujev uporabljen delno strukturiran vprašalnik. Kot kažejo rezultati, je plačna diskriminacija zaradi pomanjkanja uradnih delovnih dovoljenj za iranske migrante pomemben dejavnik vpliva na percepcije anketirancev o staranju. Študija poleg tega proučuje, kako status tranzitnih migrantov in negotovost glede njihovega bivanja v Turčiji omejujeta socialne mreže starejših iranskih migrantov ter njihov dostop do socialne zaščite, kar močno vpliva na njihove percepcije staranja.

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** percepcije, starejši iranski migranti, tranzitni migranti, Turčija

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## INTRODUCTION

Aging emerged as a significant social issue almost fifty years ago because the global number of people aged sixty and over had multiplied rapidly (UNDESA, 2019: 1–2). Scholars from almost all countries started intensely researching this social issue, reflected in many articles written on aging and its relevant aspects. Because the world population aged sixty and over has doubled since 1980, this population group is expected to reach 22% of the total world population in 2050 (Levy & Macdonald, 2016: 5–6; UNDESA, 2019: 1). Therefore, this population group has varying perceptions of their life during old age. Irrespective of their migrant status, i.e., irregular, transit, etc., all migrants should have full health support such as physical and mental health, preventive, curative, and palliative health services, etc. in their host country (UNHCR, 2015: 14), which might impact their perception toward their life in later years. Thus, migrants have different perceptions and life experiences based on their host countries' services comparable to the residents of the host countries. The varying perceptions of the migrants are available in many studies. One such study shows that Korean migrants in the United States have higher anxiety levels about psychological and physical aging than their American counterparts (Yun & Lachman, 2006: 55).

In contrast, another study delineates that many Iranian migrants in Norway are not distressed by their living conditions because of the welfare policies for refugees in Norway (Rudmin & Ahmadzadeh, 2001: 51). Additionally, care services for the elderly in the Turkish welfare regime are provided by mainly three actors, i.e., state, family, and market (Aysan & Aysan, 2016). Since the number of the elderly is increasing in Turkey, i.e., an increase of 20.8% by 2050 (TURKSTAT, 2013), Turkey has developed welfare policies to ensure long-term care services for its elderly citizens to become a welfare state (Aysan & Aysan, 2016: 37). Still, the family plays a significant role in providing care to elderly members in a developing country like Turkey (Duben, 2013: 6; Aysan & Aysan, 2016). These studies reveal that having proper treatments from the receiving countries ensures migrants' better life experience, shaping their perception of their later life when they become aged in those countries.

Although the concept of *the elderly* is used as a homogenizer to express a specific age group, there is diversity within the category between migrants (transit or any other types) and local people. In this regard, we should use an intersectional lens to consider factors such as age, gender, income, and place of residence. Intersectionality is used in inequality research to describe common connections. For example, people with transit migration status lack free movement, legal protection, etc. In the transit country, the situation is worse, particularly for women who face gendered discrimination and abuse (UNHCR, 2015: 4).

Moreover, to understand the period of old age, we must consider all these factors. The aging process is affected by the intersection of all these factors (Arun & Elmas, 2016). Migrants around the world have limited opportunities due to their fragile social status. The elderly, women, and immigrants advancing in age are at a high

risk of inequality. Although elderly Iranians in Turkey are living with transit migrant status, they have not received refugee status. Following the 1951 Refugee Convention, Turkey does not welcome refugees from non-European countries (Düvell, 2012: 421; Wissink et al., 2013: 1089). The elderly and the perceptions of aging among immigrant communities are frequently studied in-depth. However, research on the perceptions of aging among elderly migrants is scarce (Zubair & Norris, 2015: 898). No research exists on older Iranian adults with transit migrant status in Turkey. This research is the first to interview the elderly Iranian transit migrants in Turkey, thus filling this gap and contributing to the literature on this topic.

Although migration means movement from one place to another, transit migration is a blurred and politicized concept. Sometimes, it is equated with illegal migration, sometimes with irregular migration, while other times with regular migration (Castagnone, 2011: 2; Düvell, 2012: 416–417). Furthermore, to arrive at their final destination, some people must intentionally or forcefully come to third countries (Wissink et al., 2013: 1094). These elderly Iranians live in Turkey under the protection of UNHCR for a time until they can receive immigrant permission from the final settlement countries (Kaytaz, 2006). The duration of stay in a transit country may be prolonged due to political causes and policies in the destination countries or the border control policies in the EU (Düvell, 2012: 421–422). Therefore, these Iranian migrants could be termed *de facto* involuntary immigrants or any other immigrant type matched with the type given by Düvell (2012: 423) and Wissink et al. (2013: 1091). Many Iranian migrants have been living in Turkey for more than five years. As a result, some of them have already reached their later years. However, they are deprived of many facilities in Turkey assigned for elderly citizens. As a result, these older people may experience physical, economic, health, and psycho-social problems. This study attempts to discover their later life experiences while living in an uncertain condition with transit migrant status in Turkey. Transit migration is a priority issue for all IOM member countries (IOM, 1994) and all countries with irregular transit migrants and asylum seekers (Bulletin Quotidien Europe, 2006). Thus, due to political unrest in this region and the geographical location of the country (Içduygu, 2000: 358; Wissink et al., 2013: 1088), Turkey has been considered a transit country for migrants and refugees (IOM, 1995: 4; Içduygu, 2005: 1, 4). Strict border controls and restrictions on legal migration since the 1990s have led to the emergence of transit migration. Turkey became a transit country for the neighboring countries and farther countries like Somali, Bangladesh, etc. (Collyer et al., 2012: 407, 409). These migrants and refugees intending to move to EU countries are sometimes labeled as “boat people” by media or transit migrants by academics. Although there is no universally accepted definition of transit migration, people who travel a long distance through several countries intending to reach EU countries or countries in the north are called transit migrants (Düvell, 2012: 415–416; Wissink et al., 2013: 1087–1088). Iranians are one of the transit migrant groups in Turkey who have been studied increasingly in the past (Düvell, 2012: 421). This paper aims to explore how the transit migrant status of

elderly Iranians affects their perceptions of aging and daily life and to explore what types of challenges they face during their later life due to their transit migrant status in Turkey. I will also evaluate the social, cultural, and economic factors and how they shape the perceptions of these people.

## METHODOLOGY

Since qualitative researchers consciously take their own experiences into account in qualitative inquiries (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: xi; Creswell, 2014: 3), while observing phenomena, qualitative research sheds light on the social world of the participants for a better understanding of their intuitions and meanings (Somekh & Lewin, 2005: 121–123; Neuman, 2011: 421; Creswell, 2014: 185). This study uses qualitative research methodology for several reasons. Firstly, the number of elderly Iranians living in Nevsehir is unknown and may be small.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, many participants would not answer the survey-type questions due to their age and lack of Turkish/English language. Thirdly, the natural setting is a small-scale social setting. Fourthly, the research topic is about the perception of the Iranian transit migrants in Turkey. Thus, the research design is both descriptive and exploratory. Using a semi-structured questionnaire, I interviewed eight elderly Iranians who represent eight different households selected through snowball sampling because the socio-demographic and spatial distribution of Iranian migrants was not established, and reaching the participants proved difficult. Because the participants speak in other languages, I then translated the transcriptions of face-to-face interviews into English. I conducted the field interviews between August 15 and September 15, 2018. In the present research, I tried to observe the participants while conducting face-to-face in-depth interviews. I recorded some interviews with participants' prior permission. After transcription, I coded the information into different themes and sub-themes. The results were prepared through the interpretative method of data analysis because fieldwork approaches demand interpretation to understand social life (Bechhofer & Paterson, 2000: 96–97; Goffman, 2002: 149). I collected an ethics report before starting the field study. In addition, because the participants are Iranians living in the Nevsehir Province of Turkey under the protection of the United Nations, I also received official permission from the Nevsehir Provincial Migration Directorate to conduct the interviews.

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1 According to Nevsehir Provincial Migration Directorate, 1,147 Iranians live in Nevsehir as of April 29, 2020. Of them, 1,106 have International Protection, and 41 have a residence permit from Turkey (received through personal contact with the personnel of the migration directorate). However, the total number of elderly Iranians is not recorded.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The demography of European and Western countries is shaped by aging and immigration flow worldwide (Warnes et al., 2004). The number of migrants aged fifty-five and older throughout Europe is increasing significantly (Ciobanu et al., 2017: 164). According to a UN report, one of the four major trends of the twenty-first century is the increasing number of people aged sixty-five and over in the world. All the countries in the world have an increase in older populations (UNDESA, 2019: 1–3). While the UN defines the elderly as sixty years old or older, the World Health Organization (WHO) defines the elderly as exceeding a certain age in their life cycle. Although there is still debate about the onset age, we generally understand the last period of life as *old age*. Old age is a complex concept that incorporates many inevitable and uncertain social and cultural dimensions. This definition indicates that the perception of old age may differ among cultures and that old age cannot be independent of culture (Turner, 2011: 28). According to this finding, old age is socially constructed, and age-appropriate behaviors and norms are determined accordingly (Macnicol, 2006: 5). As a result, the number of old-age care services has been increasing in many countries. These services accommodate not only local workers but also irregular immigrant workers. A study advised avoiding excessive simplification when analyzing the living conditions of these irregular migrants (Anderson & Ruhs, 2010: 177). Other studies focus on immigrants' poor housing and working conditions, isolation from social life, security concerns, stress, uncertainty, access to health services, and increasing health problems (Willen, 2007). Furthermore, elderly migrants tend to have low socioeconomic status, messy housing, and reduced interaction with their neighborhoods; thus, they experience more physical and mental problems (Bolzman et al., 2004; Ciobanu et al., 2017: 168). Many elderly immigrants are involved in the supply of care services in the countries of the Global North and many European countries such as Germany, Austria, etc. (Ambrosini, 2015: 199).

Transit migration is discussed widely in most European countries and their border countries. According to Frilund (2019: 21), transit migration is a dynamic migration that is only available in this geographical region. Due to its geographical location, Turkey is a migrant-receiving country and a transit country for migrants. So, Turkey plays a vital role in the international arena of migration. Considering its historical context and geographical location, Turkey is an intense transit country in the region. It gives and receives a continuous flow of migration (Goularas & Sunata, 2015: 12). Although Turkey started receiving immigrants between 1923 and 1960, it could not stop receiving almost three million Syrian refugees due to the internal civil war in Syria (Orselli & Babahanoglu, 2016: 2065–2066).

Few studies have covered Iranian immigrants living in Turkey. However, some indicate that Iranians use Turkey as a transition country to reach the destination countries (Kirişci, 2007), while some studies are on the religious lives of Iranians (Akcapar, 2010). However, no study focuses on elderly migrants living in Turkey and

their perceptions of old age. Nevertheless, a study on psycho-social and cultural adaptations of elderly Iranian immigrants living in Canada deals with the topic (Moztarzadeh & O'Rourke, 2015). Another study shows that Western powers increasingly began to rely more on Turkey as a moderator country for the Syrian and Iranian immigrants (Mohebi, 2015). This shift may be because of the country's geographical location, which acts as a gateway with entry and exit points for many travelers using Turkey as a transit country or a country of *mobistasis-stasis*<sup>2</sup> (Yıldız & Sert, 2019).

Some studies distinguish the elderly from ethnic minorities by interacting with social policies and their "otherness" (Warnes et al., 2004: 307; Torres, 2006: 1341). Other studies term the elderly as "members of different classes" (Islam, 2014: 229) based on their gender, age, time, and space (Zubair & Victor, 2015: 961). However, Iranian migrants in Turkey are not treated with "ethnic otherness" (Zubair & Norris, 2015: 900) because of their cultural differences, i.e., language, norms, values, etc. Rather, they are treated as transit migrants waiting to depart to another country. Social categorization (Torres, 2006: 1341) makes them disadvantaged, as they do not receive any social care from the government of the transit country. Nevertheless, Ciobanu et al. (2017: 164) see the elderly migrants as social actors able to overcome their social vulnerabilities by mobilizing their resources. Migrants are one of the critical agenda items of developed countries, so host governments take measures to prevent irregular immigrant arrival. Host governments have applied oppressive policies to immigrants from eastern countries since the 1970s, and irregular migration continues from eastern to western countries of the globe. This situation can be explained by the compliance of the target and source countries with their political and economic interests (Bloch & Chimienti, 2011: 1281). Unless the source country can solve the political and economic problems in the countries, this immigrant issue will remain on the agenda of the developed countries for a long time (Andersson, 2016: 1072). On the other hand, some developed/less developed countries have attempted to cooperate with third countries to curve the irregular migration (Andersson, 2016: 1065).

## DATA ANALYSIS

During the interview, the participants first explained why they left their country for the United States or Canada. I have arranged their responses by themes and sub-themes, which are as follows:

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2 *Mobistasis* refers to a break or a halt in a particular country outside of one's country of origin during the journey of the asylum seekers from their home country to the destination place.

## Justification for leaving Iran

When asked about their journey to Turkey, the participants disclosed two main reasons for leaving Iran. One of them is based on politics and security while the other is about improving their life standard. Both the reasons are related to their Baha'i faith, a minority religion. Many Iranians came to Turkey to escape from the Islamic regime after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran (Içduygu, 2000: 360; Içduygu, 2005: 6; Içduygu & Aksel, 2012: 13). Believers of the Baha'i religion are the most persecuted minority groups in Iran, though they appear significantly in some countries, particularly the United States (The Conversation, 2017). The significant number of Baha'i believers living in the United States might be one of the main reasons it is a top destination for believers of the Baha'i faith.

## Perceptions of aging

The present study shows that the perceptions of aging among the Iranian elderly with transit migrant status are negative because of their personal, physical, economic, and social aspects or resources. The participants live in a country that is not their country of origin, so they may not have access to many services of that country. Because they are in different countries, the elderly transit migrants do not celebrate any social and cultural activities, impacting their perception of aging. A male participant describes the situation in this way: "We do not have any cultural center to meet people from Iran and Turkey and organize cultural programs. So, I always feel detached and lonely. And so, I think that I am aged."

This result supports a previous study that shows that, in addition to the resources and socio-demographic factors considered therein, ethnic background is significant for the perceptions of aging (Cramm & Nieboer, 2017: 5). Cramm and Nieboer also argue that elderly Turkish migrants who have more negative perceptions toward aging than the native elderly Dutch have poorer health and lower income and educational levels than the elderly Dutch. This wretched condition determines their aging perceptions (Cramm & Nieboer, 2017: 5–7).

Moreover, the participants have limited contact with people. They are in an unfamiliar place and bear the emotional burden of old age. Consequently, they experience loneliness. In this situation, the participants are disadvantaged in multiple ways, something that all of the respondents' statements reflect: "We are migrants (transit) here. At the same time, we are elderly. These two factors make us more vulnerable compared to the local elderly in Nevsehir."

This situation connects to the perspective of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality in my study means that the participants face multiple disadvantaged problems because of their transit migrant and elderly status, i.e., they have fewer familiar people, fewer social connections, and a greater emotional burden of old age, etc. This situation echoes the vulnerability of their social position, which



matches with a previous study that shows how the intersection between aging and migration creates vulnerability (King et al., 2017: 185). Unlike the elderly Turks who receive welfare services from the society because of their strong kinship relationship and extended social networks (Aysan & Aysan, 2016: 35), elderly Iranians are still excluded from any social services in Turkey, i.e., old-age pension scheme, health facilities, etc. due to their transit migrant status. Therefore, the elderly Iranians' combination status of being a transit migrant and elderly supports this intersectionality aspect. Likewise, the participants perceive their later age from different aspects of their life. For some, aging means loneliness, forgetfulness, and physical inability, while for others, aging means having and seeing grandchildren. In addition to these determinants of aging, respondents also mention their social environment, which affects their perception of age. Here are the perceptions of two participants: "When I cannot work, I feel that I am aged. From my heart, I am young, but physically, I am old." For me, aging means being alone mentally." And the other: "I also had forgetfulness one to two years before coming to Turkey. But this forgetfulness severely increased after coming to Turkey. I forget many things nowadays. I find it hard while working outside, and I feel old."

The latter statement is alarming because the participant struggles with memory loss, which is severe due to his immigrant difficulties. This memory loss carries the notion of aging. The participant defines old age based on loneliness and physical characteristics. Additionally, the inability to work physically takes an emotional toll. When employed children move out, sometimes elderly Iranians continue working to manage household finances and are unable to relax in their old age and spend time with their grandchildren. Another participant claims that he feels younger though he is not young anymore.

From the interview and observation, the participants are over fifty-five years old; some want to hide their age through cosmetic care such as dying their white hair. They claim to do this because they want to continue working in their current job role. In addition, some want to hide their age to find work in a factory to manage their livelihoods. To illustrate with the perception of a sixty-seven-year-old female participant: "I feel a bit old. I lived in Iran with older adults, but I always live here with younger people, so I feel old." Because of this participant's migrant status, her social environment has changed. The people who migrated from Iran to Turkey are primarily young. Compared to the young people, she is considered elderly. It means that migrant status creates different social structures that sharply shape the aging perception.

The respondents have described aging from different aspects of their life. For some, aging means loneliness and amnesia. For others, aging means physical inability to do any work and lack of family and social relationships. After researching elderly Iranians' perceptions of aging, I wanted to know which factors shape these perceptions. In doing so, I considered factors including but not limited to culture,



daily life activities, and economic conditions and their impact on the perception of aging. I tried to relate these factors to their transit migrant status.

## Culture

In the present study, I aimed to see if there are any cultural differences between Iran and Turkey because changes in culture affect working conditions, language, shopping, social institutions, and above all, the entire life of the people (Turan & Islam, 2021: 81). Almost all the respondents claim that senior citizens are highly respected in both countries. This group of people did not face any difficulties because of being in a different culture. However, the global discourse of culture, ethnicity, etc., can create situations in which cities become contested places for their inhabitants (Biner, 2007: 32). Another significant contested notion of culture could be the inclusion of the *Nevruz* celebration<sup>3</sup> into the mainstream Turkish culture, which has already become a symbol of rituals, public, love, and respect in Turkey (Yanik, 2006). Therefore, people both in Iran and Turkey equally show respect to the elderly. A female participant argues: "If anyone visits any community in Iran, they are properly welcomed irrespective of age and gender. Turks show the highest respect to us and treat us well. When we go to the hospital in Turkey, we get good behavior."

We can state that these two countries have, to some extent, similar cultural attitudes toward the elderly. As a result, cultural factors may not play a significant role in shaping the aging perceptions of elderly Iranians.

## Daily life

The observation of the respondents shows that elderly Iranians lead a very different lifestyle and living standard and cannot adapt quickly to the sociocultural settings of the new country. This result matches with previous research that mentions that the daily life activities of the Iranian elderly are dissimilar to those of young Iranian migrants who can adapt to the situation quickly with fewer risks and costs (Castagnone, 2011: 16). Therefore, their lifestyles and less adaptive capacity impact the elderly perception. These people have minimal daily activities and limited social interaction related to their intention not to stay in Turkey. One respondent stated: "I have been living [here] for the last five years. There is a state of uncertainty which is the main problem for us. During my free days, I come to the park and chat with my Iranian friends." And another: "I just come to the Gulbahce Park, meet my friends (Iranian), have a chat with them, and then return to my home. I do not go to other cities."

The participants' limited daily activities make their lives more challenging, which impacts their perception of aging. This study shows that due to their old age and

3 *Nevruz* or *Newroz* which people celebrate on the first day of the Iranian or Persian new year, marks the start of spring (Yanik, 2006: 286).

lack of body support, the participants neither prefer sports clubs nor exercise equipment at the park for physical activity. However, they accept that they should do some physical exercises to keep themselves healthy. This study's findings match previous research that argues that more comprehensive social processes and ideologies shape elderly persons' perception of their physical activity (Evans & Sleaf, 2012: 519, 524). Although the participants have been living in Turkey for a long time, they have very limited or, in some cases, no contact with the local people. This situation reflects a previous study arguing that transit migrants generally help each other maintain their daily activities (Wissink et al., 2013: 1099). These Iranian transit migrants thus have a limited social environment and activities that negatively impact their perception of aging.

### **Economic conditions**

Regarding their wage and working life, the participants mentioned that working in Turkey is not suitable for them because they do not have legal permission to work. Consequently, they faced a difficult situation upon arrival in Turkey. A participant describes his previous and current economic conditions in the following way: "We had everything in Iran like a car, home, etc. but had to leave everything behind. We have economic problems as sons and daughters cannot work due to lack of work permit." Another participant explains her current economic condition: "Our main problem is we do not have sufficient amount of money to lead a normal life as only my brother works here with a low wage."

This situation negatively affects elderly migrants' perceptions. The participants claim that they received an amount once from the Turkish Government when they initially arrived in Turkey. I asked them how they managed their expenses, one of them replied: "We don't work as we have been paid low wages." Additionally, since they do not have work permits in Turkey, employers always try to maximize their profit by taking advantage of this situation. Although most of the elderly do not have any wage-earning opportunities, few worked in factories where they worked more hours and received meager wages comparable to their local wage earners. I observed social discrimination in the wage-earning sectors. Because these people worked more hours in industries that required physical strength, their bodies reached old age faster. This condition makes them more vulnerable, and they cannot continue their work. In addition to their physical health implications, elderly Iranians do not even get recruited to new jobs because of their health problems. Although some elderly migrants have technical expertise, they do not get the job because of their age alone.

All respondents claim that their main problem in finding a decent, normally paid job is the lack of a work permit due to their transit migrant status in Turkey. These results also echo a past study that claims that there are rare employment opportunities and limited resources in Turkey for the migrants (Wissink et al., 2013: 1099). As

a result, they lack proper nutrition, health services, and social services, i.e., rehabilitation, elderly care, etc., from the government of Turkey (Aysan & Aysan, 2016: 36). So, this study argues that all these factors negatively impact their physical health and may lead to the early aging process of these people. Therefore, they cannot work in industries where physical strength is an essential factor. According to all respondents, economic insolvency is their main problem, leading to other social, psychological, mental, and physical health problems.

### **Challenges and difficulties of the elderly**

The elderly Iranians face various psychological, social, and health challenges due to their transit migrant status. The results of the present study indicate that their most critical challenge is uncertainty about the duration of their stay in Turkey. A participant describes: "Overall, everything is nice in Nevsehir except the economic challenges. We also have a state of distress because we do not know when we will move to the United States from Turkey. This uncertainty creates difficulties among us."

This uncertainty hinders their adaptation to mainstream Turkish society and impacts their physical, mental, social, and economic life, thus shaping their perception of aging. Because they do not have access to government health care services in Turkey, they cannot afford high health expenses. Those physical health problems become more severe and affect their mental and psychological health, which, in turn, affects their perception of aging. This study's findings fit with a previous study that argues that perceptions of aging among the elderly depend not only on their physical health but also on their biological, psychological, and social health (Sadeghmoghadam et al., 2019: 476).

As aforementioned, because these migrants do not have work permits, economic and other socio-psychological problems occur. Alongside these difficulties, they have other issues while living in Turkey. One respondent mentions: "Sometimes, we face different types of problems here. For example, when we go shopping, we pay more as the shopkeepers hike the price of the things for us. Again, when we get on the bus and pay for the bus ticket, the drivers sometimes do not back the change, or sometimes give back less amount of change."

From this statement, I can infer that this situation impedes participants' social network and social participation with the local people. As a result, they feel isolated, which affects their perception. The participants mostly meet with other Iranian people in Nevsehir and communicate with them in their language. Therefore, they do not feel the necessity of learning Turkish and face communication problems in transportation, streets, markets, hospitals, etc. This result directs that people face various types of old age problems due to their migrant status. It matches with a past study arguing that Korean elderly immigrants have limited contacts with non-Koreans in the United States and lack English skills, making it impossible to create social networks to live a healthy life (Yoo & Zippay, 2012: 374–375).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study shows that Iranian migrants are transit migrants and their situations are different and more complicated than those of other elderly migrants in Nevsehir, i.e., Syrians and Afghans, etc. Two main factors increase their vulnerability—being elderly and having transit migrant status (Ciobanu et al., 2017: 167)—which support the idea of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; King et al., 2017). However, challenging this intersectionality trope used in the nexus between elderly and migrants, King et al. (2017) argue that despite hardships, there are success stories of active aging that show physical, mental, and social wellbeing of wealthy and retirement migrants. Although King et al. (2017: 195) also demanded that host countries develop specific policies to cover elderly migrants, a vital question remains: What will the host countries do with the migrants staying for an uncertain period and reaching old age with transit migrant status? These two factors, i.e., being elderly and having transit migrant status, keep elderly Iranians away from social protection and services in Turkey, i.e., benefits from the state, the market, etc. (Aysan & Aysan, 2016).

As a result, these transit migrants face many difficulties in their old age. Their lack of employment opportunities and communication problems due to the language barrier is more noticeable than any other cultural clashes, i.e., clashes of beliefs, faiths, etc. Those problems affect the elderly more heavily than other age groups of Iranians in Nevsehir. The respondents claim that young Iranians receive formal education and participate in various local social and cultural activities, which help them quickly integrate into mainstream society and become less vulnerable. This result also supports a previous study that shows that because of their lack of income opportunity and communication, elderly Iranian immigrants in Canada are more susceptible compared to their adult counterparts (Jafari et al., 2010: 103–104).

Additionally, elderly Iranians communicate only with other Iranians in Nevsehir. As a result, they try to defend their collective identity and become alienated from Turkey's mainstream society, creating social competition (Islam & Bozdağ, 2021: 162) with the local people. Therefore, old age is difficult for all migrants, especially for transit migrants. Their status of uncertainty makes their elderly life more difficult and limits their social participation in Turkey. This uncertainty creates other economic, social, and health problems, amnesia, etc., affecting the elderly and their perception.

Moreover, elderly Iranians do not have social security in Turkey, which negatively impacts their elderly perception. Elderly Iranians have poor social networks and no health care services because they cannot communicate in the Turkish language. They do not want to learn Turkish as Turkey is not their final destination. This unwillingness to learn the local language is also one of the causes of their adverse conditions (Ciobanu et al., 2017: 167).

Therefore, these transit migrants do not have a known social environment and find themselves disadvantaged. Elderly Iranians face difficulties on two fronts. On the one hand, they do not have access to their country's services because they are

outside their country. On the other hand, they are transit migrants in Turkey, keeping them away from the host community. So, these two types of difficulties shape the perception of elderly Iranians in Turkey. These situations make the living conditions of the Iranian elderly more complex and make them feel older physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. Their social health determines their elderly perception.

Additionally, because of their uncertain transit migrant status, Iranian elderly transit migrants do not have access to the social services of the state given to local elderly aged sixty-five years and over by the Turkish Government such as monthly pension, universal health care system (Aysan & Aysan, 2016: 37). Nevertheless, these Iranians do not rely on the state and the market in Turkey (Aysan & Aysan, 2016), but they rely only on their families (Duben, 2013; Aysan & Aysan, 2016) and mostly on their spouses (Glauber, 2017) for the care services. My observation supports that they receive care only from their spouses and, in most cases, from their wives because other family members do not live with them due to their transit migrant status. Therefore, the elderly Iranians find the aging process very hard for them only because of their transit migrant status and uncertainty of their stay in this transit country, Turkey. Most of them argue that Turkey is not their destination. Instead, it is a transit country to reach their final destination where they would have equal access to the services for the elderly irrespective of their gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, etc.

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## POVZETEK

### PERCEPCIJE STARANJA MED IRANSKIMI MIGRANTI: PRIMER TURŠKE POKRAJINE NEVSEHIR

Mozharul ISLAM

Raziskava temelji na primarnih virih podatkov, zbranih v turški pokrajini Nevsehir, kjer so za nedoločeno obdobje nastanjeni številni iranski tranzitni migranti, ki čakajo, da se bodo preselili v ciljne države. Posledično so se mnogi med tem negotovim čakanjem že postarali. Zato je ključnega pomena raziskati percepcije iranskih tranzitnih migrantov glede njihove visoke starosti. Prejšnje raziskave so pokazale, da se starejši, ne glede na to, ali gre za migrante ali ne, zaradi svojega nizkega socialno-ekonomskega statusa in manjše interakcije z okolico med prebivanjem v drugi državi soočajo z različnimi in vse večjimi zdravstvenimi težavami. Raziskava proučuje, kako kulturni, ekonomski in družbeni dejavniki, v kombinaciji s statusom tranzitnih migrantov, vplivajo na percepcijo staranja pri starejših Irancih med prebivanjem v tranzitni državi, Turčiji. Kot kažejo rezultati študije, v kateri so bili uporabljeni opazovanje in poglobljeni intervjuji kot tehniki zbiranja podatkov ter polstrukturiran vprašalnik za intervjuvanje sodelujočih, je plačna diskriminacija eden ključnih dejavnikov, ki vplivajo na percepcije sodelujočih glede staranja zaradi odsotnosti uradnih dovoljenj za delo. Študija kaže, da imajo starejši iranski migranti zaradi svojega statusa tranzitnih migrantov ter zaradi negotovosti glede dolžine njihovega bivanja v Turčiji omejene socialne mreže ter dostop do socialne zaščite in zdravstvenih storitev in da le v omejenem obsegu sodelujejo z lokalnim prebivalstvom. Vsi navedeni dejavniki močno vplivajo na percepcijo staranja. Zato jim njihov status tranzitnih migrantov preprečuje dostop do številnih socialnih, ekonomskih in zdravstvenih storitev, ki jih je deležna domača skupnost. Tako je življenje starejših Irancev zapleteno predvsem zaradi njihovega statusa tranzitnih beguncev in negotovosti njihovega bivanja v Turčiji.