Addressing social care needs and well being of older migrants and ethnic minorities in the UK

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Why focus on older migrants?

- What happens during your younger ages impact on how you feel, act and aspire at your older age.
- How different or similar is the experience of ageing between migrants and home-born populations?
- What correct and incorrect assumptions do we make about different groups of BME older people?
A case study: Older Turkish migrants in London

- Why Turkish migrants and why London?
Turkish people are not all the same

- Mainland Turkish; Cypriots; Alevi; Kurds
- Different histories, similar journeys
- Some are not easily distinguished – invisible minority
Migration journey

• How did it all start? .. Many years ago..

• ‘I had heard from my friend [in Turkey] that the tailors earn good money in London. But I did not know English. My friend suggested I come here [London] and to work here. And I took my little daughter and came to London (in the 60s). I did not have to speak English because everyone spoke Turkish, I did not need to learn English. My friend had arranged a room for us. I worked hard and in tough conditions.’ (Woman, 72, Turkish)
Belonging

• A journey of interactions and belonging..
• Social networks → migration → social network → labour participation → social network → accommodation → life → ageing
• ‘We lived here for a long time but we had worked entirely with Turkish people as tailors. We do not know much about the English community’

(Woman, 75 years old, Cypriot)
The story

• This is only for those we talked to .. Can’t generalise
• Closed network – ethnic economies
• Informal work and family.. all tangled up
• Over a long period of time
• Relative and absolute exclusion

“I have been living in England for 35 years; I am illiterate, I did not go to elementary school because there was not a school in our village. I had worked as ‘chef’ in a Turkish restaurant for 21 years. I did not know English except ‘yes’ and ‘no’. I had never need for speaking English.”

(66, Male, Alevi)
Web of networks

Country of origin

Host Country

Welfare state

Family & Friends

Community - Kin group

Self
Ageing

• Changing gear – before and after ‘retirement’
  – Being busy in the shop/restaurants .. Then ... little activities rotating around grand parenting, TV and community group
  – Sometimes taken by surprise

• Ageing and onset of disease .. Sudden and big change .. Do I need to talk to the rest of the world ?!!

• ‘Silent’ ageing – little realisation of available support outside of close network
Who should I trust? Who should I rely on?

- Expectations from the ‘family system’ and immediate community
- Obligations and duties; unspoken rules – in many cases gender biased:

Mrs. Kaplan (71, Cyprus), been in the UK for 50 years. She had worked in Textile as a tailor at home, informal working and no employment protection. She does not have a good command of the English language. She’s been looking after her husband (80) who has a mild dementia, and blind for 7 years. She has her own health problems (rheumatoid; can’t use her fingers. They have 6 children and only one daughter lives near by she helps with cleaning, cooking and shopping.
Gaps between ideals and realities

• Availability of key family members to offer support
  – Geographical proximity and willingness
• Or the assumed duties are not fulfilled

‘They [my son and daughter-in-law] don’t give me any respect and as a person, I feel very alone in my home. never go out, always at home and front of TV’.

(83, female, Turkish)
Culture centres

• Key role:
  – socialization
  – keeping the Turkish language alive
  – exchanging information (if correctly known)

• But there are limitations to what they can achieve
  – Outdated information
  – Lack of funding
  – No real provision of activities aimed at integration
Capitalizing on social capital

• Intergenerational solidarity and strong family and community ties are assets
  – Empower informal carers and community advocates
  – Enable the community to better care
  – Increase awareness of available services and of own rights to them
  – Off-spring usually well educated and fluent in the English language- bridge to their older parents

• Gender issues: ‘Men go the Turkish Cafe or Turkish Community Centre but we [women] are not included in any Centre’

(62, female, Cypriot)
Messages to practice

• Awareness of cumulative impact of isolation and associated barriers
  – Language and communications
  – Assumptions from both sides
    • Perceived barriers that certain services are not suitable for my own needs
    • Family support should not be assumed and is not always there
  – Gender issues
    • Multiple burdens of care (partner and grand-children) and own health needs ..Less of a priority
Thank you for listening

• Further readings:
  • Oglak, S. and Hussein, S. (In press) Active Ageing, Social and Cultural Integration of Older Turkish Alevi Refugees in London. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*
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