

Chapter 1

Rural Aging, Demise of the Traditional Family and the Rise of New Family Structures in Rural Turkey: Evidences From the Province of Kayseri

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ABSTRACT

This chapter investigates the influences of rural aging on traditional agricultural production in rural areas in Turkey concerning the traditional family as a social structure of accumulation. Traditional agricultural production in Turkey, which is generally characterized by subsistence farming, relies mostly on the unpaid family worker for survival. The influences of migration tendency of younger family members to urban areas and aging which becomes a physical challenge to remaining family members on traditional family seem to be prevalently studied and argued in the literature. As a new variable, this research focuses on the influences of a specific population, who recently returns to their rural origins from urban areas after retirement. It is found in this research that reverse migration does not only contribute to the increase of elderly population rates in rural settlements and thus rural aging; it also has direct impacts both on agricultural production and traditional family structures.

INTRODUCTION

Aim, Conceptual Framework, and Spatial Context

Population aging represents a complicated demographic structure change which is explained by a multiplicity of variables ranging from increasing rates of elderly people in total population, to decreasing rates of population renewal and total fertility rates and even to the increasing population of elderly cohorts in the workforce age groups. Many of the policy makers and researchers tend to define population aging as a demographic structure problem not only in terms of national social security system problems in relation to increasing elderly dependency ratios, financing healthcare of the aging population and so on, but also in terms of total production efficiency related problems. Together with the rapid decline in the total fertility rates, population aging is seen to be one of the most important demographic structure challenges that almost all of the OECD countries face in the last three decades.

Rural population aging, on the other hand, represents a specific and much more complicated field of population aging and the aging literature seems to distinguish certain differences between rural and urban aging problems. For instance, even though financing healthcare, caregiving and similar services is defined as a fundamental challenge in aging societies, accessibility to those services represents a more complicated problem which sharpens the consequences of these financial problems. To put it bluntly, in rural areas physical and economic accessibility to those services seem to be much more challenging than urban areas simply because of the lack of economic individual capability creation capacities of rural economy and the lack of those services in rural areas.

Therefore, the edges of this double-sided aging knife in rural areas seem to be much sharper. Policy makers and researchers focus on this double-sided nature intensely. In many countries, there are great efforts to improve the quality and physical accessibility of aging related services in rural areas. On the other hand, new rural economy policies and strategies are being implemented in order to cope with aging related economic problems. However, all these policies and strategies face different problems in different places. Settersten, Jr. and Angel (2011), for instance, indicate the problems of diversity and they underline that the stability of marriage, gender roles, and the definition and functions of family need to be reconsidered continuously not only in policy making but also in studies in order to understand changing contemporary structures.

Following the idea, this research, on the one hand, focuses on the changes of the definition and the functions of the traditional extended family in rural areas in Turkey in relation to aging. In this research, the changes of the definition and the functions of the traditional extended family are attempted to be identified in context of institutional economy, which identifies five main institutional spheres including the durable relations of production, finance, the state, the family, and the world economy (O'Hara, 2000, p. 2) and defines every of these spheres as a social structure of accumulation. In tune with this institutional economy view, the changes of the economic functions of the family as a social structure of accumulation are on the focal point of this study. However, there is a multiplicity of variables which influence family structure changes. This chapter is an attempt to identify a new variable which is defined in terms of the influences of "reverse migration." The term reverse migration is used in order to identify the population who experienced migration from rural settlements to urban areas once and returned to their rural settlements recently.

Findings of this study show that this population who returns back to rural seems to create different family structures. They are not exactly traditional since they are much more open to establish modern

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