

Original Article

Evaluation of Postgraduate Theses Related to Aging in Turkey

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Abstract

Aim: The aim of this study was to conduct a content analysis of postgraduate theses related to old age.

Methods: This research was designed as a descriptive study based on a survey model. Theses published for public access between January 1, 2007 and January 1, 2017 in the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) National Thesis Center were screened using the keywords “elderly”, “old age”, and “advanced age” and a total of 405 thesis studies were identified. Of these, a total of 176 theses that met the study criteria were included in the study and evaluated. Data were collected for the study using a Thesis Evaluation Form prepared by the researchers. Descriptive statistical methods (percent, frequency, mean) were used to analyze the study data. Ethical approval was obtained from the University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee.

Results: Of the 176 studies included in our analysis, 46.6% were for master’s degrees, 14.8% were for doctoral degrees, and 38.6% were for medical specialty/subspecialty. In terms of general field, 78.4% of the theses were related to health sciences and 21.6% were in the social sciences. Determining the nature and scope of thesis studies related to geriatrics conducted at the graduate level is important in order to identify overlooked areas in this field of research. Scientific research is a prerequisite for advancement in all disciplines, and determining the quantity and quality of scientific studies related to the field of geriatrics will contribute to its academic development.

Key words: Geriatrics, postgraduate, elderly, old age, advanced age

Introduction

Advances in health and technology and improving socioeconomic conditions are extending the human lifespan. This is creating a demographic shift toward the old and very-old populations both in Turkey and the world as a whole. The elderly accounted for 8.5% of the total population of Turkey in 2017, and it is estimated that this proportion will increase to 10.2% by 2023 and show steady growth (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2018). Aging is a multidimensional process. Lifespan can be affected by factors such as physical and mental

health, cognitive and social competency, productivity, personal control, and satisfaction with life (TC Ministry of Family and Social Policies Directorate General for Disabled and Elderly Services, 2013; TC Ministry of Health Public Health Agency of Turkey, 2015). Old age is described as a period in which a person’s ability to adapt to their changing environment is reduced, and many factors can affect older adults’ quality of life, including chronic diseases, isolation, poverty, adaptation, disability, and weakness (Gokce Kutsal, 2018). It should be recognized that old age is a stage of life with specific needs that must be met. With the

increasing emphasis on healthy aging today, health care and social service interventions to improve the welfare of older adults should be developed and diversified. As part of this process, improving the quality of life as well as the length of life has become a current issue (National Action Plan for Positive Ageing for the Period 2013–2017, 2014). Requirements for quality of life are that basic needs are met and opportunities for psychological, mental, and cultural development are provided (Torlak and Yavuzcehre, 2008). Healthy aging is not dependent only on personal characteristics, but is also related to the physiological, psycho-social, and financial support a society provides their aging members (MacLeod et al., 2017; Fave et al., 2018). The growing need for resources to help older adults manage their financial and healthcare choices, Promoting Well-Being in Old Age: The Psychological Benefits of Two Training Programs of Adapted Physical Activity. National action plans in particular have focused on improving overall health and quality of life among older people through policies and initiatives related to aging (National Action Plan for Positive Ageing for the Period 2013–2017, 2014). Within this context, old age and the aging process is an area of study that brings together many different disciplines.

An examination of the relevant literature shows that the growing proportion of elderly in the Turkish and global populations is associated with a steady increase in the number of studies focusing on basic issues such as problems faced in old age and solutions to these problems. The accumulation of studies in a particular area makes it imperative to review those studies based on certain attributes and thereby get a general overview. This kind of analysis is necessary for several reasons, including to determine what has already been studied and what further research is necessary in the field, identify relevant variables, gain perspective of the field, identify the scope of study areas, and determine the research methods and techniques being used (Ahi and Kildan, 2013; Bakioglu and Gurdal, 2001). Scientific research is the prerequisite for development in all disciplines. Postgraduate theses are at the forefront of scientific research, and the quality and quantity of theses submitted in a certain field offer evidence of the progress made in that field as well as the steps being taken towards scientification of that field (Bakioglu and Gurdal,

2001; Tarman et al., 2010; Kurtoglu and Seferoglu, 2012; Aktan, 2014). In addition, compiling studies conducted in various disciplines regarding the different aspects of the same field is considered a requirement for the advancement of that field.

The aim of the present study was to analyze postgraduate theses related to old age carried out in Turkey during a period of 10 years (2006–2017) to determine their topics, research methods used, and distribution by year. This study should provide a current picture of the depth and prevalence of research on old age. It may also help researchers who want to work in this field by revealing the topics and methods necessary for further studies, presenting required information and products, developing a new perspective on the topic, and putting forward different ideas.

Methods

Study design: A descriptive research design based on a survey model was used in this study. Survey models are research approaches aiming to describe a past or current situation (Karasar, 2014). The theses included in the study were evaluated using document review technique, which involves analysis of printed materials containing information about the cases to be investigated (Yildirim and Simsek, 2013).

Study setting: Postgraduate theses published for open access on the the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) National Thesis Center website were reviewed between March 15, 2017 and May 15, 2017.

Study universe and sample: The universe of this study comprised 405 theses identified in the CoHE National Thesis Center (<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/>) using the keywords “old age, advanced age, elderly” (Board of Higher Education. National thesis center, 2018). Of the theses that were accessible in full, the keywords “old age” yielded 36, “advanced age” yielded 7, and “elderly” yielded 362 approved theses. There was no sampling; all theses in the study universe that were published in full between 2006 and 2017 and were publicly accessible in the system were included in the sample. All 405 theses in the universe were examined and the 374 for which the full text was accessible were included in this study. Of these, a total of 198 thesis studies that were unrelated to

older people, such as animal studies in the fields of biology and physiology and studies conducted in the fields of geophysics, economics, social services, bioengineering, forestry and forest engineering, pharmacy and pharmacology, agriculture, genetics, mining engineering, advertising, dentistry, textile and textile engineering, and biochemistry, were excluded from the sample. Therefore, the final study sample consists of 176 thesis studies.

Data collection tools: Data were collected for the study using a Thesis Evaluation Form prepared by the researchers.

Thesis Evaluation Form: The Thesis Evaluation Form was prepared after a review of the related literature and consisted of questions such as the type of thesis; its main subject; the affiliated university, institute, and department; accessibility of the thesis; and methods used (Appendix I).

Data analysis and evaluation: The data collected for the purpose of the study were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods (percent, frequency, mean).

Ethical Considerations: The CoHE National Thesis Center is cited as the reference for data collection in this article. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (61-2017).

Results

This study involved a survey of theses involving older adults. Of the results obtained by searching the CoHE National Thesis catalog using the keywords “old age, advanced age, elderly”, 92.3% of the theses were approved and 7.7% were not. A total of 176 theses met the criteria for inclusion in the sample.

Table 1. Types of Theses in the Sample and Their Distribution by year

Year	Postgraduate		Doctorate		Medical Specialty/Subspecialty	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
2008	4	4.9	2	7.7	8	11.8
2009	7	8.5	2	7.7	3	4.4
2010	6	7.3	3	11.5	8	11.8
2011	10	12.2	4	15.4	16	23.5
2012	7	8.5	4	15.4	7	10.3
2013	8	9.8	-	-	6	8.8
2014	11	13.4	2	7.7	11	16.2
2015	18	22.0	4	15.4	6	8.8
2016	11	13.4	5	19.2	3	4.4
Total	82	46.6	26	14.8	68	38.6

Table 2. Distribution of Theses Sampled by General Field

General Field	n	%
Health Sciences	138	78.4%
Social Sciences	38	21.6%
Other Sciences	-	0

Table 3. Distribution of Theses in the Sample by Thesis Type

Thesis Type	Research Thesis	n	%
Postgraduate	Descriptive	72	87.8
	Experimental/Semi-experimental	10	12.2
Doctorate	Descriptive	10	38.5
	Experimental/Semi-experimental	16	61.5
Specialty/Subspecialty in Medicine	Descriptive	55	80.9
	Experimental, Case-control, Case report, Observational	13	19.1

Of those, 46.6% of the postgraduate theses included in the sample were for master's degrees, 14.8% were for doctoral degrees, and 38.6% were for medical specialties/subspecialties (Table 1). In terms of basic fields, 78.4% of the theses were related to the field of health sciences and 21.6% were in the social sciences (Table 2). With regard to the research methods used, 87.8% of the master's degree theses were descriptive, 61.5% of the doctoral theses were experimental/semi-experimental, and 80% of the medical specialty/subspecialty theses were descriptive (Table 3).

The distribution of theses by year shows that the number of theses increased annually, with 48.8% of the master's theses, 42.3% of the doctoral theses, and 29.4% of the medical specialty/subspecialty theses published in or after 2014 (Table 1).

When the subject areas of the theses are examined; geriatrics (18.18%), nursing (15.34%), psychology - psychiatry (9.1%) and sociology - social services (8.5%) are in the top five.

Apart from these areas are home economics, religion, music, radio and television, health institutions management, public health, anthropology, physiology, gynecology and obstetrics, nutrition and dietetics, pharmacy and pharmacology, otolaryngology, sports, physical therapy and rehabilitation, clinical bacteriology and infectious diseases, oncology-hematology, anesthesia and reanimation, orthopedics and

traumatology, biochemistry, family medicine, gynecology, urology, gastroenterology, first and emergency aid, nephrology, furniture and decoration, dentistry and genetics.

Discussion

With the dramatic increases in life expectancy seen worldwide, the elderly population is steadily growing. Older people have become a focus of international and national action plans so that this increase does not lead to problems in social and economic areas, particularly in the field of health. Plans have aimed to create policies to help improve quality of life among the elderly, ensure their continued social integration, and manage problems related to health and subsistence (UN International Plan of Action on Aging 2002, 2018). The literature also demonstrates that theses in the field of geriatrics have increased in number and widened their scope over the years in association with the changing demographic structure of populations, with particularly notable increases in the number of theses at master's and doctoral level (Table 1).

Both in Turkey and globally, the aging population has become one of the predominant demographic issues of the 21st century (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2018; going in the Twenty-First Century, 2012). Aging of the population influences society in all aspects, including health, social security, the environment, education, business opportunities, sociocultural activities, and family life (The situation of elderly people in turkey and national plan of action on aging,

2007). Current policies and programs on old age are focused on improving overall health and quality of life (Bahar et al., 2009). Old age is a qualitatively different experience for everyone. Accordingly, theses related to old age have investigated various subject areas (Denirturk, 2015; Okten, 2015; Karaman, 2015). The majority (78.4%) of the theses evaluated in our study were in the general field of health sciences, and the most commonly studied areas in this field were nursing, geriatrics, anesthesia and reanimation, public health, psychology, and sociology. The particular emphasis on healthy and active aging and the association between health and quality of life in international and national plans of action gives direction to researchers. The international literature is dominated by research aimed at supporting independence and quality of life in older people (Batmyagmar et al., 2019; Adsett et al., 2019; Oliveira et al., 2019).

After the health sciences, the second most common general area was the social sciences, accounting for 21.6% of the theses. To achieve the objective of productive, independent, and successful aging, importance is given not only to health, but to a holistic state of wellbeing that also includes psychological and social aspects (Aydın and Sayılan, 2014). Longer lifespan, physical and mental health, cognitive and social competence, productivity, personal control, and satisfaction with life are the basic indicators of successful aging (Bowling and Dieppe, 2005; Pachana and Laidlaw, 2014). Theses done in the social sciences included topics related to the social status of older adults, improvement of living areas, and economic status, which demonstrates that the social dimension of aging is also being addressed and that contributions to the literature are being made in this area (Okten, 2015; Oksuzler, 2015; Caglar, 2015). In addition, the Third Commission report entitled “Providing Supportive Environments That Offer Opportunities in Old Age” included analyses of the current situation in Turkey regarding homes and living areas for the elderly. Action plans have been created to support elder care and caregivers and to prevent elder neglect and abuse (Satate Planning Organization, 2007). The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) supports research related to the aging population, the sociocultural status of this population, and its

social and economic consequences (UNFPA, 2019). Special emphasis is placed on research regarding the needs of elderly people living in poverty (Kwan and Walsh, 2018). Various thesis studies have evaluated satisfaction with life in old age from a sociological perspective, evaluated the relationship between social security reform and old age pensions, and examined policies related to old age in social security law within the context of social protection (Turgut Soysal, 2015; Sozen, 2014; Kurt, 2008).

In the WHO “Health for All” theme for the 21st century, the fifth objective is directly related to older people, and objective 13 includes actions for providing a healthy living area. At the International Conference on Population and Development, in which Turkey also participated, it was emphasized that the global population is getting older and that an aging population has social and economic implications, and it was stated that older people should be considered a valuable resource for the development of society. The Situation of Elderly People in Turkey and National Plan of Action on Aging 2 consists of two main sections, an analysis of the current situation and a plan of action (Satate Planning Organization, 2007). Identifying the current situation is an important first step to developing and implementing action plans related to old age.

It has been determined that most theses in geriatrics are descriptive in nature, which is the starting point of the basic research process (Pehlivan Kaya, 2015; Yildiz, 2015; Demir, 2014). This may be because a large proportion of the theses are done at the master’s level (46.6%), and these studies are believed to help clarify the current situation in Turkey. On the other hand, research done at the doctoral level generally consists of more practical and comprehensive studies (Karaman, 2015; Pehlivan Kaya, 2015; Elibol, 2015; Bayram, 2015). These practical and comprehensive studies are important in the implementation of international and national action plans.

A limitation of this study is that the theses surveyed were produced between the years 2006 and 2016. In addition, some theses from the study period were not published publicly, which limited access to the entire study universe.

In conclusion, there is a national and global shift towards a new demographic structure; estimates

suggest that with falling birth rates, the younger population will decline in coming years and the elderly will continue to represent a larger proportion of the total population. In developed countries, various evaluations and studies have been conducted regarding the effects of the aging population on socio-economic structure. Particular emphasis is placed on research and development studies directed at helping older people maintain their lives without becoming withdrawn from social life. Studies carried out by national platforms on aging are becoming increasingly widespread. Studies related to old age will continue to elucidate the health, socio-economic, cultural, and demographic features of older people, help meet their needs and expectations, and contribute to the planning of health and social services offered to the older population.

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