

Perceptions of Turkey and Germany's young adults regarding the phenomenon of old age

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Suggested Citation:

Yildirim & Kagnici, D.Y. (2023). Perceptions of Turkey and Germany's young adults regarding the phenomenon of old age. *Global Journal of Psychology Research: New Trends and Issues*. 13(2), 162-175.
<https://doi.org/10.18844/gjpr.v13i2.8828>

Received March 12, 2023; Revised July 10, 2023; Accepted September 19, 2023.

Selection and peer review under the responsibility of Prof. Dr. Tulay Bozkurt, Istanbul Kultur University, Turkey.

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Abstract

This study aims to examine young adults' perceptions of aging through intercultural research. The participants of the study were 100 young adults living in Turkey and Germany. In the study, the perceptions of the participants about aging were evaluated through metaphors, and the data was analyzed by content analysis. According to the results age was perceived as a process of physical change, illness, and health problems; experience, wise and respectable features; a process that continues to develop and learn; waiting for death, at the stage of death by participants living in Germany. For participants living in Turkey old age was perceived as in need of care, weakness, and attention and that individuals are inadequate; with experience, wise and respectable features; childlike, emotional and fragile features, pessimistic, rigid, and prejudiced; waiting for death. The results of this study are presented and future directions are discussed in detail.

Keywords: Germany; metaphors; old age; Turkey

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1. Introduction

To understand the phenomenon of aging, it is necessary to consider social, psychological, and cultural contexts together (Icli, 2008). Some factors affect the roles, experiences and perspectives, behaviors and interests, social interaction, and communication of the individual as a social being (Liao et al., 2023). Culture is an important social phenomenon that comes first among these factors. The individual's perception, values, and behavior patterns are determined by the relationship with other people in the society in which she/he lives. Another factor that determines the perception and attitude of the individual is cultural differences (Soraka & Bryjak, 1995).

An individual's cultural background and current culture are important factors affecting the individual's mind and social development (Martinon et al., 2019). Beliefs, perceptions, and value judgments of culture change from society to society, and the same phenomenon has different meanings and values in different societies. This difference between societies also causes changes in social perceptions and attitudes. Therefore, the culture and cultural factors that one belongs to are among the most important factors that determine how a phenomenon, an individual, or a system will be perceived (Barutcugil, 2011).

From past to present, societies, and cultures have different values, thoughts, and attitudes towards old age, the old and aging phenomenon. The system of thought and perception of society reveals the stereotypes and beliefs of individuals about the phenomenon of old age (Öz, 2002; Fernandes et al., 2023). Legends, values, and stereotypes about the phenomenon of old age show that old age and the aging process are a social phenomenon (Akçay, 2015). Therefore, it contains social and cultural characteristics (Yogurtcu, 2019). From the moment of birth, the individual creates a perception of old age in herself/himself with the role of the social environment, social supports and conditions in which the individual is located, and the attitudes and values about old age (Saifuddin et al., 2019). Individuals are affected by their values, judgments, and belief systems, and they also affect these values, judgments, and belief systems. As a result, this process is an indication that the social aspect of old age cannot be ignored (Senturk, 2018).

Being a universal phenomenon, old age does not have the same characteristics in every age, society, and culture. The situation of elderly individuals changes with variables such as education level, gender differences, socio-economic level, health status, social structure, and culture (Segel-Karpas & Bergman, 2022). The phenomenon and perception of aging also occur according to these variables (Giddens, 2009). In the life process, the individual has different roles and statuses in every period. The roles and statuses of the individual in old age are shaped according to the expectations, values, and attitudes of society. Therefore, differences from society to society, and culture to culture have emerged in the roles and statuses attributed to old age (Ceylan, 2015; Kalinkara, 2016). In other words, it is a known fact that the phenomenon of old age differs according to the age, region, country, and level of development of the society (Tufan, 2016; Zhang et al., 2022).

1.1. Purpose of study

How the phenomenon of aging is perceived in different countries was the main research question of the present study. Since it is important to examine the cultural differences in the perception of age to have a broader understanding of the subject, the present study was conducted. In this study, the phenomenon of old age in Turkey which has the characteristics of collectivist cultures, and Germany which has the characteristics of individualistic cultures was examined. This study aims to reveal how individuals in other age groups perceive and evaluate the phenomenon of old age from a social point of view, and how old age is shaped in the thought systems of individuals with its cultural dimension. Also, this study may contribute

to the literature in terms of raising awareness about the microaggressions that elderly individuals may be exposed to in case of possible negative judgments, by revealing the perspective towards the elderly.

2. Materials and Method

In this section, the research design, participants of the study, the data collection tool, and the analysis and interpretation of the data are given.

2.1. Participants

In this study, carried out using phenomenology, one of the qualitative research designs, the perceptions of individuals living in Turkey and Germany towards old age were examined through metaphors. 50 Turkish and 50 German voluntary individuals between the ages of 18-30 participated in the study. The study was announced to Turkish and German individuals through various social media (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, school club pages, online community-based sites.) tools. Participants who wanted to participate in the study contacted the researchers. An Informed Consent Form was sent to the participants, where the answers would be kept confidential. The scales were prepared in two languages, Turkish and German, and delivered to the participants via Google form.

When the socio-demographic characteristics of the Turkish individuals participated in the study were examined, it was found that 25 of the participants were female and 25 were male; 35 of them were single; 3 of them were secondary school graduates, 9 of them were high school graduates, 28 of them were undergraduates, 8 of them were graduates, 2 of them were doctorate; 45 of them were heterosexual, 3 were homosexual, 2 had bisexual orientation; 37 of them were Muslims, 6 of them were atheists and the remaining 7 of them had different beliefs. It was found that the mean age of the Turkish individuals in the research is 25. When the socio-demographic characteristics of the German individuals who participated in the research were examined, it was found that 29 of the participants were female and 21 were male; 40 of them were single; 1 of them graduated from secondary school, 10 of them had high school graduated, 30 of them were undergraduates, 8 of them were graduates, 1 of them were doctorate; 43 had heterosexual, 5 homosexuals, 2 bisexual sexual orientation; 30 of them were Christian, 14 of them were atheist and the remaining 6 of them had different beliefs. It was found that the mean age of the German individuals in the research was 24.

2.2. Data Collection tool

A data collection tool was developed to collect data. In the first part, there were questions about socio-demographic information, and in the second part, the following two open-ended questions about aging; "If you compare the concept of old age to animate or inanimate, abstract or concrete objects? Which object would you compare it to? What is your reason for choosing the object?". The participants were asked to explain the first metaphor that came to their minds about the concept of old age and the reasons for preferring this metaphor (Old age is like Because).

2.3. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the research were analyzed by content analysis. The answers of the participants were turned into a written transcript. Data similar to each other were collected under certain categories and later organized and interpreted. A code was created by giving numbers from 1 to 50 for each of the Turkish and German participants. T1 code was used as Turkish and 1st Participant, G1 code was used as German and 1st Participant. The metaphors that individuals use for the concept of old age are grouped under conceptual categories according to their intended use. Although some metaphors are the same, they are included in another category due to their different purpose and meaning. While the metaphors used by Turkish and German individuals were given under categories, they were supported by quotations

from their statements. Finally, the number of people and metaphors (frequencies) expressing the category and metaphor that emerged were given, and percentages were calculated.

To ensure the validity of the research; the data collection tools used in the research, and the identification and analysis processes of metaphors were described in detail. Under the heading of the findings of the study, examples were given with quotations. To ensure the reliability of the study, it was handled by two different researchers in terms of whether the determined metaphors represent conceptual categories. Then, the themes put forward by the two researchers were compared and examined. In addition, some qualitative data in the research were digitized with percentages or frequencies. While analyzing the data, the researchers did not include their knowledge, prejudices, and assumptions about the phenomenon they discussed in the study. Researchers believe that an awareness should be created for older individuals and they have displayed an unbiased attitude during the research process.

3. Results

In this section, the findings that emerged in line with the analysis of the data collected from Turkish and German individuals are included.

3.1. Results about the Metaphors of Turkish Individuals in Old Age

Fifty (50) Turkish individuals produced a total of 43 metaphors regarding the concept of 'old age'. These metaphors are categorized under 5 themes (table 1).

Table 1

Themes of Turkish Individuals

Themes	Number of Metaphors (f)	Number of People (f)
In need of care, attention, and inadequate	5	5
Being experienced, wise, and respectable	8	13
Being childlike, emotional, and fragile	7	7
Being pessimistic, rigid, and prejudiced	4	4
Waiting for death	19	21
Total	43	50

In the next section, the metaphors in each category are presented in tables. The features of these categories were supported by quoting the answers given by Turkish individuals.

3.1.1. Metaphors emphasizing that old age needs care, attention, and inadequate

Ten percent (10 %) of the Turkish individuals defined old age as a concept in need of care, attention, and inadequate in 5 themes (Table 2).

Table 2

Metaphors emphasizing that old age needs care, attention, and inadequate

Themes	Number of People (f)
Exhaustion, burnout, tired	3
Worn out engine	1
Being paralyzed	1
Total	5

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that metaphors such as exhaustion, burnout, tiredness, worn-out engine, and being paralyzed were used. The metaphors in this category focused on the need for care,

inadequacy, and weakness of old age. For example, one of the participants mentioned "Aging is like exhaustion. You're unable to work and you can't do anything. You are always dependent on others for eating, drinking, and doing your daily stuff. Besides, you are financially and spiritually exhausted, you need everyone (T 6)". The other participant explained "When you become old, you can't help yourself, you need someone even when you go to the toilet, buy bread or prepare your food. You don't have a life that you can make by yourself and manage your life (T 17)."

3.1.2. *Metaphors emphasizing that old age is being experienced, wise, and respectable*

Twenty-six percent (26%) of Turkish individuals defined old age as a concept of being experienced, wise, and respected in 8 themes (Table 3).

Table 3

Metaphors emphasizing that old age is being experienced, wise, and respectable

Themes	Number of People (f)
Wine	3
Tree, Plane tree	4
Wise	1
Being experienced	2
Agriculture	1
Labor	1
Maturity	1
Total	13

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that metaphors such as wine, tree, wise, agriculture, labor, maturity, and being experienced were used. The metaphors in this category focused on the experience, maturity, and wisdom of old age. For example, one of the participants used a tree metaphor and explained it as "Old age is like a tree. As you get older, your experience and knowledge increase. You can always see the world better and look favorably at things (T 23). An individual who used the plane tree metaphor said, "It has deep and strong roots in the soil. It stands firm in life. The plane tree shows resistance to the wind and is tied to the ground for a long time. The elderly have shown such resistance to the breezes brought by life and have become stronger in life with every knowledge they have gained so far (T 32)." Another individual who used the wine metaphor explained the idea that "Experience arises because life has taught us many things as we get older. Therefore, at that age, you will experience your most knowledgeable period (T 12)."

3.1.3. *Metaphors emphasizing that old age is being childlike, emotional, and fragile*

Fourteen percent (14%) of the Turkish individuals defined old age as a childlike, emotional, and fragile concept in 7 themes (Table 4).

Table 4

Metaphors emphasizing that old age is being childlike, emotional, and fragile

Themes	Number of People (f)
Childhood	1
Love	1
Tree	1
Twig	1
Being sad	1
To regret	1

Being lonely	1
Total	7

When Table 4 is examined, it is seen that metaphors such as childhood, love, being sad, and twig were used. The childishness, sensuality, and fragility of old age are emphasized as metaphors in this category. For example, one of the participants mentioned that "Old age is like childhood. Every behavior that children do is observed in the elderly. They always look at things with their emotions. When something they do not want, they get upset immediately or they can easily rejoice when they are happy (T 31)." Another participant who used the twig metaphor said, "They are very fragile. Unlike other people, people at that age are more sensitive in every situation (T 49).

3.1.4. Metaphors emphasizing that old age is being pessimistic, rigid, and prejudiced

Eight (8%) of Turkish individuals defined old age as being pessimistic, rigid, and prejudiced in 4 themes (Table 5).

Table 5

Metaphors emphasizing that old age is being pessimistic, rigid, and prejudiced

Themes	Number of People (f)
Dementia	1
Being unwelcome guest	1
Loneliness	1
Goat	1
Total	4

When Table 5 is examined, it is seen that the metaphors of dementia, being an unwelcome guest, loneliness, and goat were used. The metaphors in this category focused on prejudice, rigid attitudes, and pessimism. For example, one of the participants mentioned that "Old age is like a goat. Because they do not give up on what they say, the only thing they know is their truth. Everything different is wrong and bad for them (T 8)". An individual who used the dementia metaphor said "They repeat the same thing over and over and show very persistent behaviors. They don't listen to anyone and they focus on one thing and try to prove it. They believe that knowledge comes only from experience and therefore they do not believe that the other person can say something true (T 41)."

3.1.5. Metaphors emphasizing that old age is waiting for death

In 19 themes, 42% of the Turkish individuals defined old age as waiting for death (Table 6).

Table 6

Metaphors emphasizing that old age is waiting for death

Themes	Number of People (f)
Being lonely	1
Dried Flower	1
Seasons, Autumn, Latest Seasons	3
Fruit	1
Sea sparkle	1
Being burnout	1
Beginning of the end	1
Peace	1
Standing Water	1

Crop	1
End	2
Unproductive Period	1
Decay	1
Collapse	2
Stop	1
Slow Song	1
Fade	1
Total	21

When Table 6 is examined, it is seen that metaphors such as standing water, unproductive period, decay, end, fade, and collapse were used. In the metaphors, it was emphasized that the death of old age is expected death is approaching, and the end of life is about to come. One of the participants said "Old age is like the end. Because despite all the difficulties in life, we can encounter an event that can surprise people at any moment, but there is no longer a time when we can achieve this possibility in old age. The only thing that will happen is death (T 29)." An individual who linked old age to being lonely said, "Now you hang up your boots and the things supposed to be experienced have been experienced. Days that always look back to the past, not looking to the future. Each day is the same as the previous one, silently an accounting of the past days is made and the best of death is expected. This is the impression that the elderly people in Turkey (T 1)." An individual who used being burnout metaphor said "When old age is mentioned, I think of the end of life. We can't start life over again. We say goodbye to everything (T 36)."

3.2. Results for the Metaphors of German Individuals about Old Age

Fifty (50) German individuals produced a total of 40 metaphors related to the concept of 'old age'. These metaphors are categorized under 4 themes.

Table 7

Themes of German Individuals

Themes	Number of Metaphors (f)	Number of People (f)
A process of physical change and health problem	11	11
Being experienced, wise, and respectable features	10	19
A process of development and learning	11	12
Waiting for death	8	8
Total	40	50

In the next section, the metaphors in each category are presented in tables. The features of these categories were supported by quoting the responses of German individuals.

3.2.1. Metaphors emphasizing that old age is a process of physical change and health problem

Twenty-two percent (22%) of German individuals defined old age as a process of physical change and health problems in 11 metaphors (Table 8).

Table 8

Metaphors emphasizing that old age is a process of physical change and health problem

Themes	Number of People (f)
Toast	1

Broken	1
Malfunction	1
Reversed U	1
Crumpled Apple	1
Worsening of Health	1
Number	1
Rotting of a Fruit	1
Normal	1
Slow Down	1
Wrinkle	1
Total	11

When Table 8 is examined, it is seen that metaphors such as toast, fault, worsening of health, and slow down were used. The metaphors in this category focused on the physical change of old age and the health problem. For example, one of the participants mentioned that "Aging is like worsening of health. As time passes, the likelihood of health problems increases (G 8)." An individual who used a malfunction metaphor said, "It is a process where mental and physical abilities decrease (G 45)." An individual who used reversed U metaphor said, "The performance of the body and mind first increases, reaches the peak, and over time, these performances begin to decline (G 37)." Another individual who used to toast metaphor explained the ideas as "Your body, appearance, and skin are no longer as vigorous as before." (G 26).

3.2.2. Metaphors emphasizing that old age is being experienced, wise and respectable features

Thirty-eight percent (38%) of German individuals defined old age as a concept of being experienced, wise, and respectable in 10 metaphors (Table 9).

Table 9

Metaphors emphasizing that old age is being experienced, wise and respectable features

Themes	Number of People (f)
Wine	7
Wisdom	1
Learn	1
Being Better	1
Rock Climbing	1
Speed	1
Smartness	1
Tyre	4
Maturity	1
Mastery	1
Total	19

When Table 9 is examined, it is seen that metaphors such as wine, wisdom, speed, tire, and maturity were used. The metaphors in this category focus on the experience, maturity, and wisdom of old age. For example, one of the participants used a maturity metaphor and explained it as "Old age is like maturity. I think people who get older have more mature personalities. You know what you want because you have tried many ways. You consider things more calmly in old age because you can classify and evaluate problems and they're better than before. (G 3)." An individual who likened old age to a tire said,

"As you progress, you gain more life experience (G 50)". Another individual who used a rock-climbing metaphor explained the idea as "The higher you climb, the more tired you get, but the farther you can see and you are much more experienced than those who continue climbing (G 11)."

3.2.3. Metaphors emphasizing that old age is a process of development and learning

Twenty-four percent (24%) of German individuals defined old age as the process of development and learning in 11 metaphors (Table 10).

Table 10

Metaphors emphasizing that old age is a process of development and learning

Themes	Number of People (f)
Way	1
View	1
Life	1
SuperMario	1
To Gain Experience	1
Progress	1
Own Time	1
Roller Coaster	1
To Learn	2
Book Page	1
Wealth	1
Total	12

When Table 10 is examined, it is seen that metaphors such as progress, book page, life, and way were used. In the metaphors in this category, it is emphasized that old age is a process that continues to develop and learn. For example, one of the participants used a book page metaphor and explained it as "Aging is like a book page. You never know what will happen next in life. Twistings, turns and unpredictable experiences continue (G 10)." Another participant who used the life metaphor said, "You are not dead yet and you are always open to surprises, possibilities, and learning new things as life continues" (G 41). Another individual who used to learn metaphor explained the idea as "As you progress, you continue to gain experiences and learn other things (G 7)". Another individual who used the roller coaster metaphor said, "Because there are ups and downs in life that we have never encountered before. We always keep discovering something new (G 28)."

3.2.4. Metaphors emphasizing that old age is Waiting for death

Sixteen percent (16%) of German individuals defined old age as waiting for death in 8 themes (Table 11).

Table 11

Metaphors emphasizing that old age is waiting for death

Themes	Number of People (f)
Time	1
A Natural Process	1
Plant	1

Life Lesson	1
Clock	1
Sunset	1
Last Station	1
To Finish	1
Total	8

When Table 11 is examined, it is seen that metaphors such as time, plant, sunset, and the last station were used. In the metaphors in this category, it was emphasized that old age, death is expected death is approaching, and the end of life is about to come. For example, one of the participants used a sunset metaphor and explained it as "Old age is like a sunset. Although life becomes more beautiful and shinier along with age that shine fades and disappears with old age (G 19)." An individual who used a plant metaphor said "A plant is very small at first, then grows and becomes beautiful, but eventually withers and dies slowly (G 32)." Another participant who used the clock metaphor said "Because the end of our life is approaching (G 43)." Another individual who used a natural process metaphor explained the idea as "You are born, but you grow old like everyone else and eventually, you die, it's that simple (G 2)."

4. Discussion

In the present study, Turkish and German individuals' perceptions of old age were analyzed through metaphors. For Turkish individuals five, and German individuals five main themes emerged.

According to the results, 10% of Turkish individuals stated that old age is a process that needs the care and attention of others and is not self-sufficient, while 22% of German individuals stated that old age is a process in which health problems, physical and mental changes. When the answers were examined, it was seen that German individuals did not define the elderly as individuals in need of the care and attention of others, they only emphasized the physical changes. Although Turkish individuals also emphasized features of old age as health problems and physical changes, they highlighted that the elderly need the care of others and are inadequate because of these conditions. Helping the elderly and needy is important in collectivist cultures, and they are mostly cared for by their children or relatives (Emiroglu, 1989). In the 'Children's Value' survey conducted in nine different countries (Indonesia, Federal Germany, Korea, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Turkey, and the USA), it was observed that the answers of American and German individuals were different from those in other countries. American and German individuals reacted to the questions about waiting for help from children in old age. People refused to be dependent on anyone, including their children, and often answered, "I don't expect anything from my children, they should take care of themselves". Turkish participants, on the other hand, found this question strange and answered, "A good son never leaves his parents" (Kagıtcıbası, 1991). In Onat's (2004) study it was found that almost all of the elderly individuals (91.7%) did not want to stay in a nursing home. When the reasons were examined, it was revealed that 50.1% were happy to stay with their families, children of 21% of participants would not allow their parents to stay in a nursing home, 9.9% of participants liked to be alone, 2.2% participants were uncomfortable with the nursing home environment, and 1.8% of participants did not want to stay in a nursing home due to social pressure. In collectivist cultures, getting support from the family in old age, protecting and looking after the elderly; the need for closeness of the elderly is important in terms of social life and social communication (Canatan, 2008; Gungör, 2010). Family structure, care, and assistance to the family are continuing in collectivist cultures and also affect the shaping of social perception towards the elderly (Öztürk Merdin, 2020).

In the study, 14% of Turkish individuals described the elderly as childlike, sensitive, emotional, and fragile. When the answers given were examined, it was found that these individuals see the elderly like

children and perceive the reactions of the elderly as similar to the characteristics of the children. In the answers given by German individuals, no title emerged in this category. Old age is defined as a period in which physiological, psychological, and social regressions are experienced, and as a result of these regressions, elderly individuals lose their former independence, and it is stated that elderly individuals become dependent again as in childhood. This perception can vary from society to society and is affected by the cultural structure of the society (Icli, 2008). It has been observed that seeing the elderly as children and caring for the elderly are mutually supportive. It is thought that Turkish individuals' perception of old age may create a rationale for the dynamic of caregiving.

Forty-two percent (42%) of Turkish individuals and 16% of German individuals stated that they interpret old people as individuals who are waiting for death and who are at the stage of death. When the answers are examined, these individuals, who associate old age with death, state that the stage is only a period when life ends. In addition, it is an important point to consider that about half of Turkish individuals associate death with old age. In addition to being the group that is most subject to age discrimination, the elderly are mostly excluded from the general flow of social life and brought into a position that is stigmatized as inadequate. The removal of elderly individuals from active life makes these individuals more dependent, fragile, and weak (Goulding, 2018). These pressures and attitudes of other members can create an obstacle for the elderly in terms of self-efficacy, isolate them from social life, and cause elderly individuals to see themselves as worthless, inadequate, and in need of care.

Twenty-six percent (26%) of Turkish individuals and 38% of German individuals stated that they see the elderly as experienced and knowledgeable people. It has been observed that these individuals, who refer to the elderly with their knowledgeable and experienced characteristics, have more optimistic perceptions. Proverbs such as "Cok yasayan cok bilir" (they that live longest see most) in Turks and "Der beste Weihrauch kommt von alten Bäumen" (the best incense comes from old trees) in Germans reflect the perspectives of both cultures regarding the perception of old age in terms of knowledge and experience. In many studies, important findings emphasize that other members of society are aware of the positive qualities of the elderly individual's life experiences, knowledge, tolerance, and understanding attitude (Saralayeva & Balabanov, 1999).

As a result of this study, it was found that 8% of Turkish individuals emphasized the elderly people with strict and harsh attitudes and prejudiced and stubborn characteristics, and when the answers of these individuals were examined, it was seen that they had a pessimistic perception towards elderly people. In the answers given by German individuals, a title in this category did not emerge; any answer has not been found that defines old age with its rigid, hard, stubborn, and prejudiced features. 24% of German individuals stated that old age is a process that continues to develop and learn and that life is still ongoing. It was found that these individuals have an optimistic perception of the aging process. Proverbs such as "Bis zum Sarg hört man nicht auf zu lernen" (you can't stop learning until death) in German culture show the importance of this point of view in German culture. In the answers given by Turkish individuals, a title in this category did not emerge. No answer was found that emphasizes the feature of aging regarding development, learning, and continuation of life. In Turkish culture, proverbs and perspectives such as "yas 70, is bitmis" (age 70, the work is done), "ununu elemis, elegini asmıs" (hang up one's boots) are thought to be the basis for not evaluating the elderly as individuals who continue to their development and learning processes.

Although general attitudes and perceptions about aging vary from society to society, they can often be negative and biased. As elderly people are perceived as wise and experienced in some societies, a positive approach is displayed towards old age, while in some societies elderly people are perceived and stigmatized as sick, suspicious, and stubborn (Musaiger & D'Souza, 2009). Attitudes and behaviors toward

aging differ between competitive, emotionally distant, and egocentric societies and societies that prioritize family integrity (Bergman et al., 2013). In societies that adopt family cultures such as Japan, China, and Korea, taking care of, respecting, and not reacting against parents are at the forefront (Wang et al., 2009). In this study, it was found that there is a pessimistic approach towards elderly people in Turkey, where traditional and familial structure is considered to be at the forefront. Considering that the culture has changed over time, it is important to investigate the perspective of the new generation more comprehensively in future studies. Some individuals in the society may be exposed to micro-aggressions by other members of the society due to their different characteristics. Micro-aggression is the expression of aggression used against a specific group by targeting a certain feature of the group (Kagnici, 2019). According to another definition, microaggression is a verbal or non-verbal devaluing expression and attitude that conveys humiliating and negative messages targeting people intentionally or unintentionally (Allen, 2012; Sue et al., 2007).

In this study, it was found that the strengths of elderly individuals were mostly ignored by other people in society. In four of the five conceptual categories of the Turkish participants and two of the four conceptual categories of the German participants, the phenomenon of old age was evaluated negatively, and less focus was placed on the positive and good aspects of the aging period. Exposure to microaggressions harms the physical, mental, and spiritual health of individuals. In addition to its individual effects, the structure creates a more confrontational and tense climate in the social sense and prevents the development of a harmonious social structure (Unal, 2018). Therefore, it is thought that more studies focusing on the fact that these perceptions towards the elderly may be reflections of a cultural experience, stereotypes, and cultural assumptions can feed negative beliefs, and raising awareness can help reduce the humiliating and devaluing microaggressions that elderly individuals can be exposed to in every culture and every field.

5. Conclusion

The construction of the elderly, culture, and cultural differences between societies caused the elderly individuals to have different characteristics from each other and to change the behaviors, perceptions, and attitudes of other people in society towards old age. Understanding how elderly individuals affect their social structure and how they are affected by their social structure is important in terms of revealing the communication and harmony between both elderly members and other members of society. To better understand the role and status of elderly people in society, revealing the value judgments of society will provide important data to the experts for studies on developing a positive perception of old age.

In this context, it is recommended that social workers and mental health specialists inform families and organize educational activities to support the active participation of elderly individuals in social life and create programs that will support the sense of independence and self-confidence of elderly individuals. In addition, solutions should be offered to pessimistic attitudes and perceptions towards the phenomenon of old age, through cooperation between politicians and scientists, studies should be carried out on the phenomenon of old age through media and educational institutions to raise awareness, and all members of the society should be made aware of stigma.

In this study, the perceptions of young adults were examined and it was found that there were prejudices towards old age in both cultures. Starting from families, the smallest structure of society, it is recommended that developing support projects that will bring together individuals with a generational difference and increase their interaction, and processing of issues that will contribute to the transformation of intergenerational conflict into solidarity in educational environments and preparation

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of various training programs to turn the negative prejudices of individuals in the society about each other into a healthier perspective.

In future studies, it is recommended to investigate in detail the perceptions of aging and the experiences of exposure to microaggression, especially of the elderly living in Turkey. The average age of the population in Turkey is increasing rapidly. In this age group, it has to be one of the priority issues to reveal their experiences quickly in terms of services that will be provided.

There are some limitations of this study. The first of these limitations is to make a comparison between only two countries that represent the collectivist and individual cultures. The inclusion of more countries in later studies will provide a better understanding of the findings related to the perception of old age. The second limitation of this study is that only young adults were included in this study.

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