

## Social relationship network and communication at old age

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### Abstract

Old age is a period when the social environment of the elderly person shrinks due to reasons such as loss of social role, health, decline of income and empty nest situation. This research was carried out in order to determine, how elderly people use the social relationship networks and communication with their environment, to satisfy the needs for establishing relationships with other people, acceptance and belonging. In this study, interview technique was used as qualitative data collection method and four female and six male participants aged 65 and over were interviewed. Questions about socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, daily life activities and obstacles, social acquaintances, what kind of people they wanted to socialise with or not, their preferences in communication content, who they had been in conflict with in and why, were asked to participants. Among the daily activities, worshipping, listening to radio and watching television were done without gender difference, and it was found that not being able to 'visit neighbours' was in the first place among the activities that could not be done, but this was also prevented by their spouse, the daughter-in-law or the children. Their children and grandchildren were their main social acquaintances, and these were followed by relatives. They were mainly talking about the current events and politics. They preferred to talk to people with similar personality traits and people whom were generally acceptable to society. They, mainly, had conflicts with their daughters, spouse, daughter-in-laws and siblings about not doing what they wanted or being obstructed about the things they wanted to do and have financial issues. Participants who had lost their spouse and participants who lost their peers felt loneliness and felt sad for being lonely. The participants felt health was the bad aspect of being old; and being able to worship as they wanted to and getting respect were good aspects of being old. The worry about the future was determined to be individual in some participants and general in others.

**Keywords:** Social relations in old age, communication conflicts in old age, communication content in old age.

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## 1. Introduction

Today, the change in family structure, which was transformed from extended families into nuclear families, causes the elderly population to a different position from the past. Social, cultural and economical changes also create needs for the elderly population, and cause different issues and problems related to their satisfaction.

In the Maslow's hierarchy of needs love and belonging, such as being able to establish close relationships with other people and belonging to place, and acceptance comes at third after physiological necessities such as eating, drinking, sleeping, sexuality and security.

The changes in social roles with the old age, the changing family structure, the values that are attributed to the elderly, the changes in their income levels, and the health not only cause changes in the daily activities, the number of social acquaintances they have, their relationship and the communication patterns of the elderly, living in the big cities, but also the meaning they attributed to being old and their expectations regarding current and future. In this research, it was aimed to determine the social relationship networks of elderly people aged 65 years and older living at home, and their daily life activities, communication contents, and conflicts and their outcomes, which will affect these networks.

## 2. Method

In this study, interview technique was used as qualitative data collection method. Qualitative methods have been preferred because of the possible loss of perception levels due to the ages of the individuals and the understanding of the subjective situations behind the apparent reality (Icli, 2010). Interviews were conducted with 10 participants aged 65 and over to gather data. Ten voluntary elderly residents in three socio-economically differentiating regions of Ankara were selected as participants. Participants were asked open-ended questions about their socio-economic profile, daily life activities, social networks of relationships, communication with the social acquaintances, and future, to determine their views and expectations. Verbatim notes were taken at the interviews when the participant did not like to be voice recorded.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Introductory information about participants

This study was conducted with 10 elderly participants, four female between the ages of 66 and 85, and six male between the ages of 67 and 83, living in Kecioren, Mamak and Cankaya districts of Ankara. Among the female participants, 2 years ago Hatice, 3 years ago Turkan and 5 years ago Kerime lost their husbands and none of them got married again. Widowhood rate among women was higher than for men in Turkey. According to TUIK data, the proportion of elderly men who lost their spouse was 12.9%, while this rate was 50.5% in elderly women (TUIK, 2016, cited in: Ozkul, Kalayci & Aslan, 2017). Men tend to get married after spousal loss, and women can rethink due to difficult economic conditions. While getting married to a young woman after a wife's loss was considered to be usual, even proud occasion, marriage was generally not tolerated for females unless the woman had no choice (Dag, 2016). Zekiye was married for 65 years. All male participants were married and their marriage durations ranged from 42 to 50 years.

Hatice and Kerime were living alone with their unmarried sisters who had always been with them since the beginning of their marriage. Male participants continue their lives with their wives in their own homes. Only, Ismail stated that his single daughter also lived with them. All participants had children, and the number of children varied from 2 to 6. Except Mehmet, all the other participants immigrated to Ankara from other cities or provinces.

All interviewed male elders had retired from work and had pensions. Widow female participants had a pension from their spouse, while those who were married continued their lives with their husbands' income. The main source of income for all participants was the pension. However, İlhan had the additional income from the jewellery shop, Hamit had rental condo, Yusuf did few carpentry works and work as a driver when requested, Mehmet had a shuttle service, Kerime had income from the village property, İlyas's wife had pension earned through voluntary previous payment.

Participants' education levels varied between literacy and associate degree. Kerime was a certified literate, Hatice and Turkan were primary school graduates, and Zekiye was a secondary school graduate. Male participants' education levels were better than female. İsmail learned to read and write himself and received a primary school diploma at the age of 55. Yusuf graduated from primary school, İlyas dropped out from middle school at second year, Mehmet and İlhan graduated from high school, and Hamit had an associate degree.

Before retiring, Mehmet, İlhan and Hamit worked as civil servants, İlyas as a tailor, Yusuf as a driver and carpenter, İsmail as a farmer, dishwasher, guard, construction worker and tea service waiter. Kerime stated that she worked in the family business related to agriculture and animal husbandry at her village.

As a source of employment, education and income, participants differed in gender. It has been determined that women had a lower level of education than men and that they did not work and contributed to the social security system and therefore, did not have a pension.

### **3.2. Physical environmental conditions and housing**

Participants residing in the Kecioren, Mamak and Cankaya districts of Ankara were asked about their residences and their opinions about their physical surroundings; Hatice (66, widow) said she was satisfied with the house she lived in, and she did not have any problems with her house, but she found the dull environment boring. Yusuf (72, married), who lived in a large, multi-room house with a garden built 30 years ago by himself in Kecioren Etlik, said he liked the house very much and was happy with it, but was not happy with its surroundings. 'There were many friends, relatives and neighbours around 10–15 years ago, but many went to other places'. I feel uneasy about my new neighbours, I do not trust them. 'Turkan (66 widow), who lived in Dikmen, loved her home and her neighbours', but 'It would have been better if her condo was bigger. The boys would stay when the grandkids came'. İsmail (74, married) who lived in Mamak Tuzlucayir stated that, 'neighbourhood is fine by me, I love it', while Mehmet (70, married) who live in a slum style house stated that his house was beautiful to him and he wouldn't be able to leave it, because once he moved away to a different neighbourhood but returned back.

İlhan (67, married), living in Kecioren Etlik neighbourhood, said 'Thanks god, my house, my neighbours are good, as I want. In fact, we can get a better place, but, here, we have good neighbours, a nearby mosque' he said; Kerime (76, widow, Kecioren) 'My house is old, pieces of it may fell off; a new, dean condo with a large balcony looking to a major street where I could watch outside would be nice'. Hamit (68, married) whom owned another rental apartment said about the condo he resides in 'The home is old, has not been repaired for a long time. Urban transformation is imminent, spending money at this time is not smart, but of course I would like to live in a better neighbourhood, at a better home. A home with a garden, a gazebo, a car park ...' İlyas (83, married) moved from Ayranci to Eryaman for large parks, and wide streets but spends his time at Ayranci because his social acquaintances were in Ayranci.

Home has important functions for elderly people such as energising, stimulating, resting, symbolisation of self-esteem and status. Homes can provide the tools that individuals need for the activities they want to accomplish. For the elderly, who live in the same house for a long time, trust was created since they recognise their neighbours, they were in an environment they knew. For this reason, the house is a point of reference for the adaptation of the elderly to time and space. Because

of the social support provided by close friends, and neighbours for shopping, and daily chores was important to sustain the lives of the elderly (Gurney & Means, 1993, cited in: Hablemitoglu & Ozmetin, 2010, p. 169).

The housing provides the basic protection for the elderly, but it has been found in a study conducted by Ozmete (2008) that some of the participants' fears were increased and they did not feel safe due to the increase of the number of neighbours they did not recognise in the apartment building or the environment they live in. And also Yusuf expressed the same problem in our study.

Residence and the environment in which the residence is located are important because it can affect the mediation of the difficulties that age-related physical losses in elderly's lives and loneliness significantly. While only one of the participants who were living in a condo were satisfied and happy with condominium life style, three of the participants living at slum style houses were pleased with their garden and independent houses.

### **3.3. Daily life activities**

In the old age period, activities slow down and accordingly life satisfaction decreases (Kurt, Erkal & Beyaztas, 2008, p. 32). Since activities that contribute to the formation of a new social acquaintances to replace the lost acquaintances with age have the ability to affect life satisfaction positively, interviewed elderly were asked questions about the daily routine and non-routine activities, and leisure activities; it was found that female participants' activities were limited to the domestic activities and visiting nearby places. Cooking, housework, craft, praying, reading the Quran, watching television, talking on the phone, sewing, babysitting the grandchildren, were domestic and visiting relatives and neighbours were outside activities.

From the responses of female participants, it was seen that the activities were also related to traditional roles of the women and limited with house and its immediate surroundings within the limits of social acceptance, and also affected by age, health and marital status.

For male participants just like female participants praying, babysitting the grandchildren and watching television were the domestic activities limited to the house; however, they were conducting activities such as going to the mosque, exercising, going to work, gardening, visiting friends at work, going to coffee shop, NGO, local, club and fishing out of the home. In the study conducted by Softa (2015), the major daily life activities of the elderly, who live in the home environment, were visiting friends, worshipping and gardening activities (p. 69). In their study conducted in Ankara, Kerem et al. (2001, cited in: Ilgar, 2008, pp. 88–89) found that 78% of the elderly spend their free time with passive reactionary activities such as watching TV, listening to radio, chatting, and 22% of their time with active reactionary activities such as gardening, home maintenance and walking. In Ozkul et al. (2017, p. 375) research, watching television, worshipping and neighbour visits were among the top three daily activities of elderly women. In the research conducted by Kray (1999) in seven provinces, traditional leisure activities differed according to gender (Yuksel, Dincer, Buyukkose & Lale, 2014, p. 108).

All the female participants performed activities such as housekeeping and cooking, except Ilyas all of the male participants visited their friends in the work places.

Turkan, a widow, states that her daily activities differed because her husband was not alive and her daughter-in-law was obstructing. 'When my husband was alive, none of my days were similar'. Now, every day is the same. I love to travel with my son and my granddaughter, but my daughter-in-law is jealous, and she wants my son to be with her side'. Kerime, a 76-year-old widow living alone, was different from the others due to age and health-related issues. She reads the Quran at home, watches television and do crafts and says, 'If the weather is nice, neighbours take me to grocery shopping to bazaar, or park, or for a stroll; else I wouldn't go out much. I love getting out, but my children, my daughter-in-laws, my grandchildren say you should not be out alone, who would watch out for you, but they are not taking me out themselves'.

Zekiye, who was the oldest among the female participants (85 years old) and who lives in Cankaya, differs from other female participants in terms of daily activities. She was often accompanied by her 88-year-old husband to the municipal senior citizens centre and they were happy from the centre; because of her lower back issues and difficulties about walking and standing, she could only do things that could be done while sitting such as cooking and sewing, at home. Apart from activities such as visits to neighbours and relatives outside the home, Turkan notes that she often spends time in a non-governmental organisation where she and her neighbours cook for the needy people.

Yusuf, 72 years old living in Kecioren, who differed from the other participants because he wanted to do variety of things and obstructed, criticised and chastened by his wife about most of these things and stated that he was unhappy and complained about these by saying 'I wake up every morning with Ezan (call for prayer) and do my morning prayers and do some gardening until 10 at when I drink tea and start working in my carpentry workshop at downstairs. If I am bored, I nap or walk about the busy streets. I enjoy making toys for my grandchildren, making big tables that can gather the whole family, listening to folk songs, to whistle, to sing, but my wife does not want me to whistle claiming that it attracts the demons. And also, she does not want me to make the same things (carpentry) and gets angry. There are TV series that I like and I want to watch them, but she changes the channel because she does not like the theme or find it ridiculous and wants to watch religious channels'.

Ismail, a 71-year-old man who has lived in Mamak Tuzlucayir, who has learned to read and write on his own and has attained primary school diploma at adulthood, says after the breakfast he generally goes to the Kizilay (downtown) or the community centres (Halkevleri) and does not have the habit of hanging out at coffee houses, and reads the newspapers and books at home; expresses his feelings about his reading habits in the following way. 'When I go out, there should be something to read with me like a newspaper or a book. I am ashamed if there is not a newspaper with me. I see idle people sitting in the bus, sitting at a coffee house. If I do not have a pen in my pocket, I can't feel easy. I can't believe to people who can stay idle without doing anything'.

Ilhan, who has retired at the age of 67 in Kecioren, and opened a jewellery shop after retirement, differed from other male interviewers in daily activities. Every morning he wakes up with morning call for prayers (ezan) and goes to mosque saying 'Praying at a mosque is more of a good deed' and after that he goes to the workplace every day if he does not have an illness or go to a funeral. In his spare time, he reads newspapers and solves puzzles, and on weekends go to the countryside to take care of his country home and garden. He also says that he went to Hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca) with his wife and went to Umrah (voluntary pilgrimage) almost every year.

Among the male participants, we see that Ilyas aged 83, did cycling 10–15 km every day which was an active workout. Even he had been moved to Eryaman neighbourhood due to favourable conditions for fitness sports, he was going back to his old neighbourhood to hang out with his social acquaintances at municipality's elderly centre almost every day.

When asked what activities they wanted to do, but could not do, and whether there was a personal reason or another person as a barrier; participants indicated that their desire to travel and their needs were not fulfilled sufficiently and listed health, loneliness, daughter-in-laws, spouse, and inadequate physical environment as obstacles. These obstacles stem from the close social environment, effect the life satisfaction of the individual and causes conflict between the obstructed and the obstructive.

### **3.4. Social relations network and communication**

One of the basic conditions of social life is that we continue our life with the existence of other individuals. We have the most intense social relations with family and friends. These environments meet the social needs of the individuals as social beings. In the old age period, the environment of the elderly narrows due to environmental reasons such as inadequate social, cultural and economic (Peace, 2014, cited in: Erol, Sezer, Sisman & Ozturk, 2016, p. 61). Social interactions were very important for elderly individuals. According to research, maintaining spiritual and moral condition was

more important than the decline in physical capacity and health deterioration for the elderly (Baran et al., 2005, p. 279, cited in: Icli, 2010, p. 11). The extent of social relations eliminates the negative aspects of ageing and creates a balance against social role losses (Icli, 2010, p. 12).

Social adaptations, engaging in social relations and family and society affairs of elderly people are different from each other (Kurt et al., 2008). In old age, friends groups are more important than family relationship because families do not always stay together at advanced age (Gorgun-Baran, 2003, cited in: Ilgar, 2008, p. 83), the younger generation seen as insurance for old age, build their own nuclear families and abandon the large families (Danis, 2017), many of the older friends get sick, die or move to other places. For these reasons, a friendship environment composed of friends and acquaintances at different ages serves both as a protection against such a loss and provides happiness (Ilgar, 2008, p. 83) and older people with wider social networks were less affected by the negative aspects of ageing (Icli, 2010, cited in: Karatas & Durmaz, 2017).

In the answers to the questions asked to identify social networks, it was seen that all elderly participants had a social circle of children and grandchildren apart from their spouses among married participants, but these circles differ in their face-to-face meeting frequency, communication content and consequences. Evidently, the family relationship of some of the participants could be characterised as strong in terms of quantity and quality and makes the person happy, while for others it was a source of complacency and unhappiness.

Hatice, widowed with three children living alone, talks to her children almost every day on the phone and they get together every 3 months. She feels unhappy when she could not meet them. Turkan, widowed with two children who lives with her sister-in-law, says that her only worry was being away from her son and that she could see him once a week if her daughter-in-law does not prevent him from coming to her. 'They come once a week, but they leave the child. My daughter-in-law gets bored, she claims to work all the time and deserves to get out, and my son follows her' and Turkan was not satisfied with this, and it seems like she blames the daughter-in-law in this matter. According to Akcay (2011), the fact that women entering the work force cause problems for the elderly in participation to social life. For the daughter who got married and settled in another city; she says 'My daughter got married with much difficulty, she cannot come. She is not employed, she found her husband with hardship. I went to her once, if she comes she may attempt to stay in, and I can get stuck with her, oh!' 72 years old Yusuf, married with four children says 'three of my children live in apartment buildings, apartments feel overwhelming to me, and I do not want to leave my house. My wife never understands me. I used to have a friend named S., she died 4 years ago. I used to talk to her the most. Now share with my older sister. He expresses the sadness and complaints of his shrinking social circle, 'Until recently, like about 5 years ago, we had friendship circle, we would sit together at an NGO, or in a coffee house and had a conversation, but now they all died except one.

Seventy-six year old Kerime Hanim, a widow with six children and living alone, said 'Three of my children are at abroad and they do not spend time at home when they come. The grandchildren do not stay; they say kids would get bored. I'm angry and offended about that. They do not stay for a week; they travel in the country and have a seaside vacation. They do not offer to take me with them ever. They would not ask ever, if I need anything, or offer help for chores... no, they say we are tired and here for a vacation. The children living in Turkey come in from time to time, but when they come home, since as a couple they are working, they say we are tired and expect service, they want me to cook for them. I occasionally meet my neighbours. I do not have much of a peer, either they died, they are sick or their children took them away'.

Ilyas, 83 years old, has three children, four grandchildren and married. He says 'Neighbourhood relations are over, no peers, no relatives. My friends come home every 2-3 months, but 90% are dead, most of them paralysed, or ill. My son works in Russia, my daughters live in Ankara, but I do not go to their home because their home is cold, we talk on the phone'.

Zekiye, 85-year-old, married, with two children says 'My single retired daughter living nearby comes to eat dinner at the evenings, leaves as soon she finishes her dinner. She speaks little, and does not like conversation. We tell each other if anything extraordinary happens. We rarely speak about everyday things'. Although Zekiye did not have a strong relationship with her children, she described her husband as 'the rose of the grassy garden that she would sacrifice herself for' and acknowledges that he never upsets her.

For Ilhan, who was very happy with the relations with his spouse, children and grandchildren, describes his wife as 'My wife is very docile, calm and grateful. We go everywhere together, to a funeral, to a wedding. Everywhere she is loved and respected. More than 40 years passed, and we shared all our moments with love'.

The social circles of participants; apart from their spouses, children and grandchildren, were composed of friends, relatives, neighbours, and people at NGO and club centres. Although the social environments consisting of the neighbours were more emphasised by the female interviewers than the men, there was no other remarkable difference in terms of the gender. But among the female interviewers, Zekiye and Turkan had social acquaintances in the local charitable organisations. Zekiye said 'nowadays, people in Turkey seeing each other outside of houses. But the conversation in a home would be warmer. There is a terrible disconnect in human relationships. In order to spend time and have a chat, we are coming to this centre for old people, and also, we go to the military social centres. While Zekiye goes to elderly centre to spend time, Turkan says 'Sometimes we have a place that the neighbours take me to, where we make dumplings, filigree or something to help needy. I talk to the women there', and while they are helping, they can communicate and interact with people outside their immediate surroundings.

Participant Hamid has social circles at Men's sports club, Ilyas has in the municipal elderly centre, Ismail has at people's community centre.

Unlike other interviewers, participants Turkan and Ilhan stated that they had social circles consisting of tradesmen apart from children, spouse, grandchildren, siblings, relatives and neighbours, and only Ilhan had a social circle from the people he met during the yearly pilgrimages he went.

Among the answers given to the question about what they talk to the people they meet; preferred subjects were daily news, events, policy, opinion exchange, technical information about electronic devices; in addition recreation, handicrafts, problems with children and grandchildren, and issues related to the future, religious topics, experiences, memories and sports were some other topics.

Turkan answered this question as follows: 'I talk about everything. I lived in a big city, I understand a lot of things. Sometimes my daughter-in-law says that, I cannot talk to you about everything; not at all. But I like to chat about religious matters. We talk about our relatives, news and the neighbours'.

Mehmet; 'In general, conversation was about livelihood or politics. We will assess our own views and talk about issues such as the situation of the country. These topics are opened with friends with whom I can have longer conversations. While discussing politics, I do not understand how the time passes, but I wouldn't miss my return time to home. I only share important things in my life with my wife. When I'm bored, I talk to my relatives; if there's a problem I talk to my son'.

Zekiye said that the subject of the conversations was 'a delicious different recipe, the situation of the country, and the children, subjects that is exciting to me; but I only share the secrets with my husband'.

Among the answers given to this question, there was not a difference based on gender about topics such as daily news, events and policy-related conversations, which were the most preferred subjects by both male and female participants, but the differences were about the subjects related to food, crafts, recipes and sports.

In responding to the question of what kind of person they prefer to talk to, the respondents emphasised personality characteristics such as thoughtful, understated, joyful, cheerful, nice, humane, harmonious, generous, well behaved, honest, trustworthy, helpful, dignified, social and calm. Among the answers, Zekiye differentiates her preference from other female interviewers by saying 'I should enjoy my friendship, I do not like idle conversation, I should be able to learn from it ...'; Hatice by saying 'people with similar life styles to mine'; Ilyas by saying 'should be knowledgeable and cultured'; Ismail by saying 'At least he has to be a social democrat. I do not make friends with people who are not like that'.

When they were asked whether they prefer to talk to people who have characteristics, the participants emphasised personality traits such as liars, rude, unappealing, crooked, cunning, insidious, deceitful, gossiping, nasty, grumpy and unreliable. İlhan, who was a pilgrim and who went for Umrah almost every year and did not disrupt his worship, differs from these personality traits by saying, 'Human beings should enjoy religion and customs. I do not talk very much with people who are not religious, whom dresses showing skin, and who are unpredictable', and at the same time, he preferred his social circle to be composed of religious people. Hamit, whose son had cancer and whose family lives were affected by this a lot, has stated that he did not prefer to talk to people who were talking about old age and hardships. Mehmet also stated that he had absolutely no contact with the people who were using drugs and stealing.

When the participants asked questions to determine with whom and in which topics they were experiencing conflicts with their social circles, five of the participants acknowledged that there were people they had conflicts and listed the reasons for the conflicts. Hatice stated that she was in conflict with her daughter who does not want to cover her head. Yusuf was experiencing a constant conflict with his wife and sibling and expressed this: 'I want to listen to the Turkish folk songs, whistle, sing, but my wife does not allow this claiming it attracts the devils. I want to watch the TV series named *back streets* (police—crime show) I like, my wife finds it nonsense, she does not like it, and wants to change the channel. I also like to listen to the Black Sea region folk songs, but my wife obstructs this because she wants to watch the religious channel. Although we do not have any financial problems, my wife complains about me being a prodigal, and I am very angry with this cause, She tries to stop me from buying the carpentry materials that I want to get. My wife is so religious that she constantly requests me to pray and worship. She wants to go to Hajj. and she wants me to go with her'. He also loves to talk, chat and talk about his experiences. 'My wife says, I talk too much and tries to silence me. She ridicules me and embarrasses me'. In addition to these conflicts that he experiences with his wife, Yusuf also has a conflict with his wife and siblings, except for one about inheritance. He has been in conflict for many years with his siblings except his sister, whom did not gave his deserved share of the family inheritance; and his wife was constantly blaming him and debating about this issue.

Turkan (66, widow), who lived with her sister-in-law had conflicts with her daughter and daughter-in-law, did not care much about her conflict with her daughter, because she felt like it was under her control, but she was aware that she could not solve her problems with her daughter-in-law whom she sees as the only obstacle for her to experience the happy relationship with her son; as a result, she constantly complained and she was unhappy about this situation. Although, Turkan was a powerful self-sufficient, self-confident lady and she was distinguished from the other female participants with her social circle and her distinct look, she was not able to reconsider her demands to resolve this conflict, and to show empathy. Turkan said 'After my husband died, I always wanted to be together. My daughter-in-law does not want to buy a condo near my home. They come once a week but they leave the child. My daughter-in-law gets bored, she claims to works all the time and deserves to get out, and my son follows her. I love to travel with my son, but if my daughter-in-law does not keep my son busy. My daughter-in-law is a little jealous, she wants my son to by her side, and baby sit the child so she can relax. If my daughter-in-law does not invent an excuse they come on the weekends. I lived in a big city, I understand many things, can talk about anything, but sometimes My daughter-in-law claims that I do not understand and she cannot talk to me about everything'. She says 'It is not like that at all'. And she gives examples from the problems she had experienced with his daughter-in-law.



Turkan cannot understand her daughter. About her daughter she says 'Grumpy, a little rebellious, does everything as she wants to. If she listened to me and she already had children by now. My son always listens to me, but my daughter says that you did it wrong, scolds, does not listen, leaves abruptly, and always finds the blame on me. So I do not want to talk to her. The girl, not the boy, is grumpy, will she be able to take care her living expenses herself! I hope her husband would not divorce her, I cannot deal with a widow daughter'.

Kerime (76, widow) who lived alone had a problem with her son, her daughter-in-law and grandchildren, and when they came together she cannot agree on TV programmes to watch with her grandchildren and she says 'Sometimes when I tell something to the grandchildren they laugh; I cannot be sure if it is good or bad'. She expresses her opinion about the conflict with her older son and her daughter-in-law as, 'He kept badgering me about selling the fields. I have a rental income. A little money comes every year. Come on! These two have eyes on my property. Those will stay as it is, until I die, I don't care what is done after me'. In addition, she expressed how her children did not let her to speak by saying 'I cannot talk to my kids about everything. Since they are educated, they think they know better and do not let me talk. Especially, the big boy interrupts me rudely'.

Hamit (68, married) with three children explained that he dashed with his younger daughter about money, and this caused him grief. 'The little girl is disturbed by the fact that we have involved with her older brother. My son who is a cancer patient is taking the house rent money. The little girl complains about this, by saying you are favouring him, we need money too. If I'm about to say something, she leaves the room and goes to another room'.

In a research conducted by Ozkul et al. (2017, p. 74) existence of disputes and conflicts experienced with children were determined. In this study, it was determined that conflicts with children, spouses and daughter-in-laws, especially in the three elderly participants were significant, while male participants were having conflicts with spouses and siblings, female participants who had lost their spouses were having conflicts with children and daughter-in-laws.

All of the men who were interviewed were married, while female participants were widows other than Zekiye. Those who were widows were living alone except the Turkan who lived with her sister-in-law. In Turkish society, men generally marry younger women than themselves and their life expectancy is slightly lower than that of women (Hablemitoglu & Ozmete, 2010), men marry again since there is no social pressure on them about marriage after their partner passes away, but women continue their life as widows because their social environment does not look marriage after their husband passes away very positively. This study's results were also similar to previous research. All of the participants had children and grandchildren, and they all lived in separate houses. According to Heylighen (2003), belonging which is among the needs that determine the meaning of life means; physical and social belonging, getting help from family members, having neighbours who can help when needed (Ozmete, 2008, p. 9).

Old age, marital status, gender, health, economic conditions, living situation, education, social circles, elderly discrimination affect older people's social relations, their willingness and efforts to create a new social environment, or not.

When participants were asked how they feel about feeling the gap that occurs because of social role loss after retirement, partner loss, and children getting married and leaving home.

Kerime, the 76-year-old widow who lived alone answered this question 'I am alone, does the bird count? I'm talking to my bird. No sound at home. They bought me a bird so there would be sound at home. Can a bird take person's place? People always have a need for another person. My Lord, let no one be alone'. The cause, she saw, for her loneliness was the death of her spouse and peers, the sickness of her peers, or their children's moving them away, her illnesses, their age, their children's jobs and their indifference.

Loneliness occurs when emotional needs such as love, compassion, attachment and being valued were not met, and in cases when social relations cannot be realised as a result of lack of reliable relationships (Hablemitoglu & Ozmete, 2010, p. 172). In the study of Ozmete (2008), it was found that those who received social support from their children were more likely to be happy. Sensation of loneliness leads to the appearance of sensitivity, emotionality and rigidity in people (Akgul, 2016, p. 280). Weiss (1973) refers to two types of loneliness, emotional and social. Social loneliness; lack of perceived social interaction, feelings of being part of a group in sharing activities based on common excitement with groups of friends; emotional loneliness was perceiving inadequate intimacy and feeling not accepted. Peplau and Perlman (1982, cited in: Kapikiran, 2016, p. 14) define loneliness as a person feeling lack of relation networks.

Among the participants, apart from Kerime who stressed her loneliness directly and many times, Zekiye who was 85 years old and living with her husband (in Cankaya) went to municipality seniors centre with her 88-year-old husband and spend time with other elderly people to overcome the feeling of loneliness, because people do not choose to do home visits in the neighbourhood where they live, and the fact that although her daughter was coming home every day, it was just for the dinner, and she was closed for communication, and her peers were deceased. Because she had education, social position, acquaintances and local culture, Zekiye was trying to alleviate her loneliness in different places. Arun (2008) and Kalaycioglu, Tol, Kucukural and Cengiz (2003) found that the presence of an association, foundation, institutional affiliation, presence of close friends, the number of friends, meetings with family members and its frequency alleviate loneliness, and educated, modern individuals with urban backgrounds, found the remedy from the social activities in order to cope with the social exclusion.

Yusuf, aged 72 years old, suffered the lack of social circles that would make him happy and express himself, because of various reasons such as pressures of his wife, whom he could not get along, not seeing his siblings due to inheritance issues except her sister, his old age, not seeing old colleagues due to retirement, passing away of a female friend from the neighbourhood whom he got along with very well and understood him. According to Genctan (2000, cited in: Ilgar, 2008), elderly people suffer the loneliness created by the absence of a person to be replaced and the loss of the role played by the absent social status Yusuf said 'The place and time I have involved with the society the most was at funerals for the last few years'.

Research conducted by TUNSTALL shows that women were more likely to complain about loneliness than men, people older than 75 years of age were more likely to complain about loneliness than people between the ages of 65 and 74; people with health issues were more likely to complain about loneliness than people with good health (cited in: Lehr, 1994). Hablemitoglu and Ozmete (2010) also stated that women feel lonelier because they were living longer and were confronted with uncertainties more often than men. Elderly people who lost their spouse, never married and divorced have been found to feel more alone than elderly people living with their spouses. (Cacioppo, Hughes, Waite, Hawkey & Thisted, 2006; Schaff, 2007; Steptoe et al., 2013; Victor et al., 2005, cited in: Kapikiran, 2016).

### **3.5. Opinions about old age and worries about the future**

In a study conducted by Sokolovsky (1999, cited in: Idi, 2010) with people over the age of 60 in traditional societies, it was found that the elderly individuals were assessing the old age related to the practices they experienced. Old age was a distressing period for elderly people due to loss of social role, loss of income, loneliness, decline in health, having to face with death as their age progresses (Kalkan, 2008, p. 13). Life satisfaction was determined by being optimistic towards life, enjoying daily life activities, having life goals, being able to assume the responsibilities of life till now, thinking that they achieved the goals they aimed and seeing oneself as a valuable asset (Neugarten, 1961, cited in: Softa, 2015).

Yusuf and Hamit saw the grandchildren as a good part getting older; İlhan who had higher level of education and income than the other elderly participants says 'Thanks god, I am thankful that I had not any work, or economic problems. Since I am the elder in the extended family, everybody gets together at our house, I get respect. I lived as a young person in my youth, I live well in my old age; I have a happy life; I am doing my worship. I do not rush after work like I used to, and I do my worship comfortably'. Kapikiran (2016) found that the higher the level of income, the higher the perception of life satisfaction, and social support the perception of loneliness get lower. Turkan Hanim answered this question as follows. 'What's nice about getting old! Nobody stays with you. Everyone is going away left and right, after work you're alone'. According to Arpacı (2005), although most elderly people tend to live alone, they prefer to live close to their relatives they can relate to (s. 21-22), Akozer, Nuhurat and Say (2011), determined that loneliness, changes, and physical difficulties were the first three of the negative aspects of ageing. Turkan said 'The only good thing is that we are using the municipal busses free after 65 years of age. Kerime said the only good side of the old age is that the municipality cleans the house every month'. Hatice said she can worship comfortably like İlhan. Mehmet, like İlhan, sees being respected as the good side of old age. Genc and Dalkılıç (2013) found in their research, after ageing related diseases, sense of respect and reverence was the second perception elderly had about getting old.

As for the good aspects of old age, İlhan expressed only one good aspect while five other participants stated more good aspects. The majority of the group saw health problems as bad aspect of old age; Kerime expressed her opinions on this issue. 'Old age is so hard, you cannot go everywhere, if you eat salty, your blood pressure rises, and I walk around with measuring devices. Moving, going up and down stairs is difficult, I cannot catch my breath. You cannot take care your personal chores. You can be laughing stock of children. When I cannot climb down (the stairwell), they complain. How could I jump (move) like them. And the people around you are always sick. Your peers, stink drug. Is this good! I have sickness, I cannot sit down and get up fast so they do not even invite me'. While Zekiye said 'Not being able to do what I wish' İsmail said 'There is nothing good, I look forward for death', İlyas said 'No good aspect' and Mehmet Bey, 'I did not see any good or bad aspects'. In the research conducted by Arpacı and Ersoy (2007), it was concluded that women had more negative views than men in their opinions regarding the old age period.

Participants had very different answers to the questions about future concerns. Yusuf, Hamit and Zekiye had stated that they did not have any concerns about the future. Although Turkan said 'I have no concern for my own, and I have a pension for my expenses and have my condo', saying 'I hope (insha'Allah) her husband would not divorce my daughter; what if I had to deal with a widow daughter... and also it would be better if I won't fell down and break my bones, or get sick, no worries except these' shows that she had worries. Akçay (1994) found that participants were concerned about their future related to relationship with their children. İlhan: 'After this age, I have no worries for myself, I only ask myself whether I am doing enough for the life after death'. Hatice pointed out that 'My children moving away from me, not having anybody to look after I in my sickness, not being able take care of myself, being in need of care, and not going to Hajj'. Kerime 'I have no worry about the future, why would I have? Nobody needs me! There is nobody here with me anyway, no one is coming. If I am sick, you have a pension that I can pay to the hospital, I can hire a woman (nurse) to look after me. No one should say, I took care of her. There is no place to get away from death!' İsmail 'I do not have any hope about the future'. İlyas 'I have worries, not about myself, with our general future'. Mehmet said, 'I never thought of the future. Either I did not have time or I did not want to think, but I do not have any worries'.

Only one participant indirectly points out to sickness about future concerns although majority listed sickness in the bad aspects of the old age, and predominance of concerns such as loneliness, worries for children and society as a whole was evident. This can be interpreted as psychosocial concerns of the elderly which was a priority.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this qualitative research, it was aimed to determine how the network of social relations in old ages, the social circles was formed, and the content of communication and the problem, source and reasons of communication with these circles. It was determined that women had a lower education level than men, did not work in the social security system and therefore, did not have a pension. It has been determined that all of the participants had children and grandchildren, that men were married, except for one of the women female participants were widows and lonely. It was also determined that all participants had their own homes, men had own pensions and widows had pensions from their death husbands, no economic stress was emphasised.

The daily activities differed based on gender, some participants faced obstacles due to their families regarding their desired activities. This caused the conflict within the family and unhappiness. The social circles for both male and female participants were mainly their children, neighbours, relatives, friends and people at the NGOs, and siblings.

In the context of communication with the social environment, current issues, policies, memories were in the first place and did not differ in terms of gender and education. Chatting with the need for technical knowledge was limited to the use of mobile phones and electronic devices, and it has been seen that males preferred it more.

Almost every participant had different characteristics in terms of people they prefer to talk to in their social relations, but most of the traits were related to their personal characteristics and were considered to be socially accepted positive characteristics, while unacceptable traits were features that prevent participants from communicating with those who have these characteristics from. In the preferences, beliefs and values-based lifestyle similarities and political views were also expressed by some participants.

The communication conflicts were limited to family and close relatives. The lack of mention of a conflict with non-relatives can be attributed to the fact that participants did not choose to communicate with people whom they were likely to experience or have a conflict with.

The conflicts were related to monetary, belief-worship, need for attention and love, and activities to be done, and at present, it seems to be difficult to solve these due to expectations, conditions and chronicity of these conflicts.

The presence of children, grandchildren, siblings and relatives, especially among the widowed participants, had not been able to elevate the feeling of loneliness, children's lack of interest, mutual expectations, create the sense of lack of communication, loneliness, and unhappiness that arise as a result of conflicts arising from these expectations not being met. There have also been participants who point out that there were some worries about the future of the community as well as some concerns about health of individuals.

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