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The Opinions of Teacher Candidates on the Elderly in the Family

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Abstract

Teacher candidates, who will assume important roles in raising the future generations, have a great responsibility in bringing the children in obtaining a positive point of view on elderly. Therefore, the opinions of teacher candidates, who will raise the children that will assume important roles in defining the social structure, on the elderly in the family are of a great importance. This research had been organized and conducted so as to define the position of teacher candidates on the elderly in the family. The research had been carried out with the teacher candidates who study at Gazi University, the Faculty of Educational Sciences of Industrial Arts, Family and Consumer Sciences Teaching programme in 2012-2013 school year as senior students. In this qualitative research focus group discussion was used. A semi-structured question list was used as data collection tool. Within the scope of the research, in-depth face-to-face discussions with 20 teacher candidates in total had been made. The answers to the questions on discussion formula had been separately listened and the common utterances had been grouped and classified. Each answer had been expressed numerically and frequency values of these numerical views had been calculated by means of SPSS (Statistics Package for Social Sciences) software. As a result of the research from the teacher candidates on the care and protection of the elderly in the family: The elderly should be taken care of culturally in the family by their children (14 candidates), the elderly should be consulted partially during the decision-making processes in the family (8 candidates), and on the elderly's being sent to the senior centers: I am absolutely against it and the elderly should stay at their homes or at their children's homes (12 candidate) answers had been received.

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1. Introduction

As a result of rapid changes and scientific discoveries, the lifespan of human beings has prolonged and the

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elderly population proportion has risen increasingly. According to 2012 results of “Address-Based Population Registration System” (ADNKS), it is expected in our country that the population of the people at the age of 65 or over to increase to 8,5 million in 2023, 19,5 million in 2050 and 24,7 million in 2075 according to population projection results (TÜİK, 2013).

This drastic increase of elderly population in developed and underdeveloped countries will cause serious problems in family and society in countries of the world. These problems are expected to come up in using health care services, providing healthcare expenses, organizing and financing of social security institutions, adequate service and employment opportunities. In addition, it has been stated that the elderly may encounter problems in such issues as social support provided by family and immediate circle, adaption to aging period, acquiring adequate payment, retirement and accommodation (Akgün, 2004; Esen, 1992; WHO, 1993). As a communal and social consequence of the fact that elderly persons experience these problems, senility is seen as a social problem. Many developed countries tend to focus more on the “dependency burden” aspect of the senility period. This is because the elderly are defined as dependent, lacking of social autonomy, outcast and burdensome individuals for productive world (Troisi, 2002). This approach has started to show itself as a common belief in our country, as well. It is because as a result of industrialization, urbanization and social change the family structure has changed and therefore the status of the elderly both in the community and in the family has changed (Bilen, 1993). Negative attitudes towards elderly continue to be a problem in every part of the world. While an elderly person was a more appreciated and respected individual in the conventional societies, the change of family structure in present living conditions, hardship of living conditions, the fact that the elderly are not productive and increasing health problems have caused the value attached to the elderly to vanish. The elderly individual possessing a certain authority in his or her family is no longer a “last resort” as authority. The elderly person, experiencing generation gap issues with his or her children and grandchildren, is seen as an individual of a consumer group and a burden to the family and the community and thus isolated from the society (Spier, 1992, Gething et. al, 2004; Er, 2009).

The whole world is facing fundamental structural problems that it has never faced before. The solution to these problems can only be possible with the young people having the ability to make innovative designs for the future, without being excluded from the decision-making processes of the society and with the knowledge of the elderly being passed on to the new generations in improving these abilities as the academic researchers have already shown. In addition, the fact that the elderly groups of the society who possess value and capacity are being excluded from the society presents a big loss for all humankind. No matter how much the elderly get isolated, they are the source of support, security, knowledge and experience which young people cannot give up (Tezcan, 1997).

Not only there are studies showing that undergraduate students possess negative attitudes towards elderly individuals (Slevin O’Da, 1991; Kite et. al., 2005), there are also studies showing that students possess positive attitudes towards the elderly (Wilkinson et.al, 2002; Fitzgerald et. al, 2003; Kishimoto et. al., 2005; Lee et. al., 2005; Hughes et. al. 2008; Yılmaz and Özkan 2010). Teacher candidates have assumed important roles in raising the future generations. Teacher candidates have important responsibilities especially in bringing the children in a positive point of view on senility. Therefore, the position of teacher candidates who will raise the children that will assume important roles in defining the social structure is of great importance. Furthermore, this research is important in reflecting the elderly and the concept of elderly aspect of the environment in which teacher candidates were raised and which they conceive. From these viewpoints, this research was planned and carried out in order to define the position of teacher candidates on the elderly in the family. To that end, the answers to the questions on the opinion of teacher candidates on the care and protection of the elderly in the family, on consulting the elderly in decision-making processes of the family and on the elderly people’s being admitted to the retirement homes had been sought.

2. Method

Focus group discussion method had been used at this qualitative research. The aim of focus group discussions were to acquire in-depth multidimensional information on opinions of the teacher candidates, their livings, experiences, ideas, attitudes and habits on a predefined subject. The important thing in these discussions was to create an environment in which teacher candidates could express their ideas freely. The reason why focus group discussions that allow reaching points of view of a certain number of people simultaneously were chosen (Glesne, 2013) was the desire to challenge the results of other quantitative youth researches qualitatively and to interpret them profoundly (Kuş, 2003). The research had been conducted with teacher candidates studying at Family and Consumer Sciences Teaching programme under Gazi University, the Faculty of Educational Sciences of Industrial Arts in Ankara.

A semi-structured question list had been used as data collection tool. Within the scope of the research, three sessions taking two hours in the same day had been conducted with 20 teacher candidates in total, consisting of 10 females and 10 males, by planning a session for each question and face-to-face, in-depth discussions were carried out by allowing 6 minute-long discussions on average for each person per each question (session). The instructions were limited to a context-reminding nature according to the process of discussion and the interviews were recorded in audio format. Discussions on diverse theme topics were carried out and a quite rich material pending for being evaluated surfaced. This method enabling the teacher candidates to communicate their opinions on the subjects in interaction and dialogue was another factor rendering the obtained material even richer.

The answers to the question on discussion formula were listened and reported by the researchers separately and the common utterances were grouped and classified. Each answer was expressed numerically and the frequency values of these numerical views were calculated by means of SPSS (Statistics Package for Social Sciences) software. Opinions of the teacher candidates were shared out as direct quotations. The reason why direct quotations were used is as it reflects the answers of the individuals being interviewed or observed strikingly (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005). The name of the quotation owner was not made explicit and only a number defining the poll was stated so as to specify to whom the opinion belonged. M or F letters were added in front of the defining number in order to express the gender of the teacher candidate. The ones beginning with M were coded as male and the ones beginning with F were coded as female teacher candidate.

3. Findings

Of all the teacher candidates taking part in the research 7 are 22 years old, 7 are 23 years old and 6 of them are 24 and over. Of the teacher candidates, 7 of them have a sibling, 7 have 3 or more siblings and 6 have 2 siblings (except for themselves). 13 teacher candidates stated that their mothers graduated primary school; 4 candidates stated that their mothers graduated secondary school; 2 candidates stated that their mothers graduated high school or its equivalent; 1 candidate stated that his or her mother graduated university or college. There are 6 candidates whose fathers are primary school graduates; 6 candidates whose fathers are secondary school graduates; 5 graduates whose fathers are high school or equivalent school graduates; 3 candidates whose fathers are university or college graduates. It has been confirmed that 12 of the teacher candidates' mothers are housewives; 4 of the mothers work temporarily in intermittent periods; 2 of them work permanently and again 2 of them have retired. The fathers of 10 candidates work in permanent jobs; 8 fathers have retired and 2 fathers are unemployed. 18 of the teacher candidates stated that they live with their parents and siblings permanently; one candidate stated that s/he lives with his or her spouse, one candidate stated that s/he lives with a grandparent and 12 of the candidates have been apart from their families for 1-4 years; 4 of them for 5-8 years; 2 of them for 9-12 years and 2 of them stated that they still live with their family.

3.1. The opinions of the teacher candidates on the care and protection of the elderly in the family

Of the teacher candidates who support the idea that the elderly should be taken care of in the family by their children, **M9** stated that: "The elderly in the family are our ancestors and if they need care and protection these needs should be satisfied."; **F14** stated that: "The people who have family culture in general take care of their parents and certainly in some situations like after marriage, the fact that the other party does not want this is about him or her not obeying to the family culture."; **F13** stated: "The elderly should absolutely be taken care of. I think that they are the peace and richness of a home."

Of the teacher candidates who support the idea that they should be admitted to retirement homes but their children should always show their respect and affection to them, **F9** stated that: "If no one is employed in the family and there is no benefit from the family, they should be taken care of in retirement homes and their children should always deal with all of their problems."; **M11** stated: "Some elderly have neither someone nor someone to take care of them. For this reason, the elderly should be admitted to the retirement home"; **M9** stated: "If the elderly person does not have any relative or their relatives are irresponsible, they should be admitted to the retirement home mandatorily."

When asked of their opinions on the care and protection of elderly in the family, it has been observed the teacher candidates replied that they should be taken care of by their children in the family (14 candidates) and that they should be admitted to retirement homes if necessary but their children should always show their respect and affection to them (6 candidates).

The majority of the teacher candidates taking part in the research support that the elderly should be taken care of by their children in the family. This shows that the elderly still retain their position in the family and their value in

the society.

3.2. The opinions of the teacher candidates on consulting elderly during decision-making processes in the family

Of the teacher candidates of the opinion that it should also be asked partially to the elderly, **M11** stated that “As there are many generation gaps, the elderly might not know what is going on in current period. We should help the elderly in every issue yet ask their opinions as well.” While **M8** having the position that everyone’s opinion should be asked in the family without discriminating young and elderly stated that: “There should be no consultation. There should be a co-decision and the elderly should also take part in consensus if they live in the same house. It is because everyone is equal; however, they may not be able to make good judgments as they do not understand current issues.”

Of the teacher candidates, **F15** expressing that the opinion of elderly should be asked stated: “Elderly should be consulted due to their experiences.” while **M16** stated that: “In my opinion, their opinion should also be asked as their experiences can sometimes provide us with foresight to the issues.”

The opinions of the teacher candidates on consulting elderly during decision-making processes in the family were expressed as: the elderly should be asked partially in decision-making processes (8 candidates), everyone’s opinion in the family should be asked without any discrimination against young and elderly (6 candidates), and their opinion should absolutely be asked (6 candidates).

3.3 The opinions of the teacher candidates on admitting elderly to retirement house

Of the teacher candidates supporting the idea that they are absolutely against elderly being admitted to the retirement homes, **F2** stated: “Anti-retirement home... They are not retirement places!!! They are the homes for lonesome and the elderly waiting by the window until night so that their relatives come to visit them. No one has the right to make their parents live those”; **F5** stated: “I think they should not be admitted. If they raise and take care of their children until a certain age, it is their right to be taken care of when they get old as well”; **M7** stated: “The elderly should not be committed to the retirement homes. There is no such bliss for human beings as living in peace at their own homes. Though they are called retirement homes, every human being living there is alone.” and **F13** stated: “As long as I am alive, there is no such thing as sending our elderly to the retirement homes”.

Of the teacher candidates supporting the idea that admitting the elderly to the retirement homes is sometimes right and sometimes wrong, **F6** stated that: “If there is no benefit from the family, they should get admitted to the retirement homes.”; **M9**: “If there are not many relatives of the elderly or they are irresponsible, it is better if they get admitted to the retirement homes.” **M11** stated: “It is really nice such institutions exist. Because some of the elderly neither have someone nor someone to take care of them, thus, the elderly should get admitted to the retirement homes.”

When opinions of the teacher candidates on the elderly being admitted to the retirement homes were examined, more than the half of the candidates responded as they are absolutely against it and they should stay at their homes or their children’s homes (12 candidates) while almost half of them replied as the elderly being admitted to the retirement home is sometimes right and sometimes wrong (8 candidates).

It is harder for the elderly to maintain their own lives with an increasing age. Therefore, while the approach in which the elderly are served in the environment in which they live is being adopted, there are institutional care services as well. However, while more than the half of the teacher candidates are against elderly being admitted to an institution considering that they cannot make themselves comfortable under an institutional care or that the value given the elderly by the society would diminish, almost half of them viewed the elderly being committed to a retirement home optimistically on the condition that they are being followed up by their children, as the elderly being taken care of at the homes has become almost impossible due to the reasons such as women having entered into business life and extended families being replaced by nuclear families.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

Of all the teacher candidates taking part in the research 7 of them are 22 years old, 7 are 23 years old and 6 are 24 and over. Of the teacher candidates, 7 of them have a sibling, 7 have 3 or more siblings and 6 have 2 siblings (except for themselves). 13 teacher candidates stated that their mothers graduated primary school; 4 candidates stated that their mothers graduated secondary school; 2 candidates stated that their mothers graduated high school or its equivalent; 1 candidate stated that his or her mother graduated university or college. There are 6 candidates whose fathers are primary school graduates; 6 candidates whose fathers are secondary school graduates; 5 graduates whose fathers are high school or equivalent school graduates; 3 candidates whose fathers are university or college

graduates. It has been confirmed that 12 of the teacher candidates' mothers are housewives; 4 of the mothers work temporarily in intermittent periods; 2 of them work permanently and again, 2 of them have retired. The fathers of 10 candidates work in permanent jobs; 8 fathers have retired and 2 fathers are unemployed. 18 of the teacher candidates stated that they live with their parents and siblings permanently; one candidate stated that s/he lives with his or her spouse, one candidate stated that s/he lives with a grandparent and 12 of the candidates have been apart from their families for 1-4 years; 4 of them for 5-8 years; 2 of them for 9-12 years and 2 of them stated that they still live with their family.

When asked of their opinions on the care and protection of elderly in the family, it has been observed the teacher candidates replied that they should be taken care of by their children in the family (14 candidates) and that they should be admitted to retirement homes if necessary but their children should always show their respect and affection to them (6 candidates). The opinions of the teacher candidates on consulting elderly during decision-making processes in the family were expressed as: the elderly should be asked partially in decision-making processes (8 candidates), everyone's opinion in the family should be asked without any discrimination against young and elderly (6 candidates), and their opinion should absolutely be asked (6 candidates). When opinions of the teacher candidates on the elderly being admitted to the retirement homes were examined, more than the half of the candidates responded as they are absolutely against it and they should stay at their homes or their children's homes (12 candidates) while almost half of them replied as the elderly being admitted to the retirement home is sometimes right and sometimes wrong (8 candidates).

In accordance with the results obtained from the research, it might be recommended:

- Giving material or moral support to the families by the state for the care of elderly at home;
- Popularizing courses for nursing the elderly at home;
- Addressing the needs of families that need help by the state by sending nursing personnel who has trained in those courses;
- Organizing various projects on every subject related to the elderly (care, protection, health, psychology, etc.) by either public sector or private sector and universities and making these projects appear on public service announcements in order to raise awareness;
- Carrying out comparative researches both qualitatively and quantitatively on young people from different occupational groups who study at universities;
- Encouraging university students studying social sciences and especially teacher candidates to participate in scientific meetings on senility such as symposiums, panel discussions, etc. and to visit elderly.

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