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Commendatory Book Critique and Expanded Analysis on Global Public Health Challenges for The Elderly

Yaşlılara Yönelik Küresel Halk Sağlığı Sorunlarına İlişkin Kitabın Olumlu Eleştirisi ve Genişletilmiş Analiz

Verda TUNALIGİL¹

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A positive critique on Professor Dilek Aslan's book on aging and public health

In her book, *Halk Sağlığı Bakış Açısıyla Yaşlılık* (A Public Health Perspective on Aging), Professor Dilek Aslan, MD, a distinguished authority in public health, provides a profound exploration of aging as a critical issue in contemporary society (Figure 1). She challenges the tendency to defer the consideration of aging with phrases like “not yet” or “a long way off,” emphasizing instead its immediate and comprehensive relevance. Professor Aslan's work brings to the forefront that old age presents unique experiences, insights, and opportunities for the transmission of wisdom to future generations, thus highlighting the urgent need for a focused understanding of aging within public health.

Professor Aslan's scholarly approach integrates insights from various disciplines within the framework of public health. The book thoroughly examines the role of aging within the broader public health landscape, addressing demographic shifts that influence health needs, essential definitions and concepts, primary determinants of aging, and the complex changes that occur throughout the aging process. It explores negative attitudes and behaviors towards the elderly, prevalent health issues in old age, healthy lifestyle practices, and, furthermore, the current state of scientific research on aging, both nationally and internationally.

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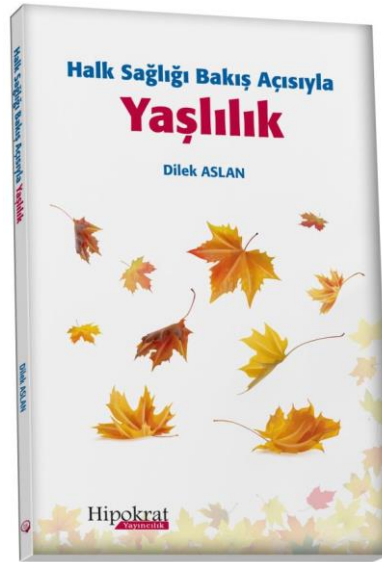


Figure 1. Aslan, D. (2023). Halk Sađlığı Bakış Açısıyla Yaşlılık (A Public Health Perspective on Aging).

A notable strength of the book is its reliance on evidence-based, current scientific data, which enriches the reader's understanding and establishes the work as an essential resource for public health professionals and experts in related fields. The timeliness of the book is particularly significant given the global and Turkish context, where demographic transitions are resulting in an increasing proportion of elderly individuals. This makes informed, proactive strategies in public health more critical than ever.

Professor Aslan's decision to write this book reflects her deep commitment to advancing public health through a comprehensive and scholarly examination of aging. This endeavor is particularly timely, as it addresses critical issues in gerontology at a moment when understanding and addressing the challenges of aging have never been more crucial. By investigating into negative attitudes and behaviors towards the elderly, prevalent health issues in old age, healthy lifestyle practices, and the current state of scientific research on aging, both nationally and internationally, the book provides invaluable insights into these pressing concerns. Her insights into how public health professionals can use this knowledge to improve health outcomes and address the challenges of aging are both timely and invaluable. The book is not only a critical academic contribution but also a practical guide for developing effective interventions and policies.

The book is a significant scholarly work that addresses a crucial and increasingly relevant issue with sophistication and rigor. Professor Dilek Aslan's contributions offer a profound understanding of aging and its implications for public health, emphasizing the importance of focused attention on this global challenge. This book is an essential read for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for the elderly and improving health outcomes across all stages of aging (Aslan, 2023).

Having closely followed Professor Dilek Aslan's esteemed career with profound respect, this manuscript aims to offer a modest contribution to an area that aligns closely with her distinguished expertise in the major global public health challenges confronting the elderly population. This critique seeks to complement and extend the foundational perspectives presented in her invaluable book, advancing the scholarly conversation on this critical issue.

Beyond the pages: An expanded analysis of global public health challenges for the elderly, inspired by the book

Inspired by Professor Dilek Aslan's influential work, her assessments encourage public health professionals to further address the multifaceted challenges faced by the elderly worldwide. In addition, Professor Aslan's recent publication on global health (Aslan, 2024) exemplifies her sound judgment in producing extensive, merit-driven research on relevant global health issues. By building upon the foundational insights presented in her 2023 book on aging, this current analysis examines emerging trends, policy implications, and innovative solutions critical for improving the health and well-being of aging populations. Through a synthesis of current research and practice, the discussion advances the dialogue on effective strategies to address pressing issues and promote a healthier future for the elderly. The elderly population is becoming increasingly vulnerable to urgent public health threats. As global demographics shift toward an aging population, it is essential to understand how these issues affect older adults. This study explores the intersections between global public health concerns and elderly health, with a focus on pandemics, chronic diseases, antimicrobial resistance, and the impacts of escalating conflicts.

By 2050, 80% of older adults will live in low- and middle-income countries. The global population aged ≥ 60 is projected to nearly double to 2.1 billion, with those aged ≥ 80 anticipated to triple to 426 million. This rapid aging presents significant challenges for health and social systems worldwide (World Health Organization, 2022). The World Health Organization's "Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030)" aims to improve the lives of older adults by addressing ageism, shifting societal attitudes, enhancing environments, and strengthening health and social systems. The initiative seeks to promote healthier, more inclusive, and dignified lives for older people worldwide (World Health Organization, n.d.).

In 2023, the countries with the highest percentages of their populations aged ≥ 65 were led by Monaco, where 36% of the population falls into this age bracket. Japan followed with 29%, while Portugal and Bulgaria each reported 24%. Italy had 23% of its population over 65, and Germany, France, Greece, and Sweden all had 22%. Spain, Austria, Finland, and Denmark were next, each with 21% of their

populations ≥ 65 . Norway and Switzerland had 20% in this age group, along with Belgium and the Netherlands. The United Kingdom and Canada each had 19%, and the United States had 17% of its population aged ≥ 65 . These percentages reflect the varying degrees of aging populations across different nations (Dyvik, 2024).

In 2023, Türkiye's elderly population reached 8,722,806, marking a 21.4% increase from 2018, with the proportion of elderly in the total population rising from 8.8% in 2018 to 10.2% in 2023 according to TurkStat's Address Based Population Registration System. Of this elderly population, 44.5% were male and 55.5% were female. The age distribution showed that 64.0% were aged 65-74, 28.1% were 75-84, and 7.9% were ≥ 85 , with 6,609 centenarians constituting 0.1% of the elderly population. Türkiye is experiencing significant demographic changes, with the median age increasing from 32.0 in 2018 to 34.0 in 2023, and the elderly dependency ratio rising to 15.0% according to TurkStat's 2018 Population Projections. This ratio is projected to increase substantially in the coming decades. Globally, Türkiye ranks 67th out of 184 countries by the proportion of elderly, which is 10.0% while Japan, Italy, and Finland have the highest proportions as noted by the United Nations World Population Prospects (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2023).

Older adults are at an elevated risk for severe outcomes resulting from infectious diseases such as COVID-19 and influenza, due to their often compromised immune systems and the higher prevalence of comorbid conditions that contribute to increased susceptibility to complications and mortality (Farshbafnadi et al., 2021; Chatterjee et al., 2023). Effective strategies for safeguarding and managing the health of older adults during pandemics are imperative. These strategies should include prioritizing vaccination efforts and implementing health interventions specifically tailored to the needs of this population (Zhang et al., 2022). The increasing prevalence of antimicrobial resistance presents significant risks for older adults, who frequently rely on antibiotics for treating infections. Resistance can, additionally, result in treatment failures and severe health outcomes (Ventola, 2015). Addressing antimicrobial resistance through improved stewardship practices, research advancements, and robust policies is essential to protecting the health of elderly individuals (Soraci et al., 2023; Majumder et al., 2020).

The prevalence of chronic diseases such as obesity, hypertension, and cardiovascular conditions among older adults is well-documented and exacerbates their overall health burden. Research is ongoing to identify new indicators for these conditions and to better understand their impacts on health (Sun & Li, 2023). Chronic conditions, including heart disease, diabetes, and cancer, require complex, continuous management (Barajas-Nava *et al.*, 2022). These challenges are further compounded by disruptions in health care access and economic instability, which can affect financial resources for elderly individuals, including pensions and health care funding. Economic instability

from conflicts and other global challenges can reduce their ability to access necessary services and support (McMaughan *et al.*, 2020; Tang *et al.*, 2022). Strengthening economic policies and social safety nets is essential to safeguarding elderly populations during periods of instability.

Access to health care services is a critical issue for the elderly, who may encounter barriers such as transportation difficulties, financial constraints, and limited facility availability (Hossen *et al.*, 2023; Mohd Rosnu *et al.*, 2022). These barriers are exacerbated in low- and middle-income countries, leading to significant disparities in health outcomes. Socioeconomic factors play a crucial role in influencing both health and health care access for older adults. Addressing these challenges requires increased financial investment and targeted actions to improve access and reduce disparities (McMaughan *et al.*, 2020). Conflicts and crises can further disrupt health care systems, affecting the ability of elderly individuals to receive routine care and manage chronic conditions. Such disruptions exacerbate health problems and increase vulnerability, highlighting the need for resilient health care systems and effective emergency response strategies (Arage *et al.*, 2023).

Older adults are particularly susceptible to environmental health risks, including extreme temperatures, air pollution, and poor water quality. These environmental factors can aggravate pre-existing health conditions and introduce new health risks. Implementing targeted interventions and policies to address environmental health concerns is essential for mitigating their impact on elderly populations (United States National Research Council Committee on Chemical Toxicology and Aging, 1987). The mental health of older adults is frequently underappreciated despite being significantly impacted by social isolation, cognitive decline, and age-related stressors. These issues are further exacerbated by difficulties in accessing appropriate mental health care, making it crucial to enhance services and support systems for the elderly to effectively address these challenges (Reynolds *et al.*, 2022). The mental health impact of conflict and displacement further intensifies issues such as depression and anxiety among older adults (Charlson *et al.*, 2019). The trauma and stress associated with these situations disproportionately affect older adults, exacerbating age-related mental health issues (Hansen *et al.*, 2020).

Elderly individuals in conflict zones face severe challenges related to displacement, including mobility difficulties and the need for specialized care, which complicate their access to health services. Older adults are often neglected in humanitarian crises, with more immediate needs taking precedence. It is essential for humanitarian efforts to prioritize the needs of older adults in crisis situations to mitigate adverse health impacts (van Boetzelaer *et al.*, 2023). In conflict situations, elderly populations experience heightened mortality and morbidity due to health care disruptions and

increased exposure to health risks. Mitigation strategies should focus on improving access to care, ensuring continuity of treatment, and providing targeted support during crises (Arage *et al.*, 2023).

Table 1. Overview of major global public health challenges for the elderly population.

Issue	Description	Strategies for Management
Infectious diseases	Elevated risk of severe outcomes from diseases like COVID-19 and influenza due to compromised immune systems and comorbid conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prioritize vaccination efforts - Implement tailored health interventions for older adults
Antimicrobial resistance	Increased risk of treatment failures and severe health outcomes due to reliance on antibiotics and growing resistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve antimicrobial stewardship - Advance research - Implement robust policies
Chronic diseases	High prevalence of chronic conditions like obesity, hypertension, and cardiovascular diseases exacerbate health burden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuous management of chronic conditions - Research new indicators and impacts of these conditions
Economic instability	Disruptions in access to health care and economic instability affect financial resources for older adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthen economic policies - Enhance social safety nets
Access to health care	Barriers including transportation issues, financial constraints, and limited facility availability exacerbate in low- and middle-income countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase financial investment - Target actions to improve access and reduce disparities
Environmental health risks	Extreme temperatures, air pollution, and poor water quality can worsen pre-existing conditions and introduce new risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implement targeted interventions - Develop policies to address environmental health concerns
Mental health	Social isolation, cognitive decline, and age-related stressors impact mental health, exacerbated by difficulties in accessing care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhance mental health services and support systems - Address impacts of conflict and displacement
Challenges in conflict zones	Severe challenges such as mobility difficulties and specialized care needs in crisis situations, likely to be encountered by older adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prioritize older adults in humanitarian efforts - Ensure continuity of care and targeted support during crises

This overview addresses major global public health challenges for the elderly, focusing on critical areas such as pandemics, chronic diseases, antimicrobial resistance, and healthcare access. It highlights how these issues disproportionately affect older adults and includes environmental health, mental health, health inequities, and the impacts of displacement. Each challenge's implications are discussed, along with strategies for mitigation and key references for further reading. The aim is to provide a comprehensive assessment of urgent issues and potential solutions for improving elderly health and well-being during crises (Table 1).

Conclusion

Professor Dilek Aslan's 2023 book on aging and her 2024 book on global health are not merely academic endeavors. These works are also clarion calls for urgent action. The insights presented into the complexities of aging compel gerontologists, public health experts, and professionals in related fields to confront and embrace the transformative potential of an aging population. The expanded analysis further galvanizes the call to action by revealing the formidable global public health challenges faced and conclusively highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies to address these issues.

At the crossroads of demographic change, this moment must be seized to champion innovative solutions and compassionate policies. The issues at hand, including pandemics, antimicrobial resistance, and chronic diseases, require not just attention but relentless commitment. The goal is to forge a future where the dignity and well-being of the elderly are paramount, health systems are resilient and equitable, and every individual's later years are marked by health, respect, and opportunity.

This is a call to action to harness today's insights and build a more just and effective public health response. Rising to the challenge involves turning collective knowledge into meaningful change and ensuring the promise of a healthier, more inclusive world for the elderly becomes a reality.

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The entirety of the research study, including the literature review, research idea conceptualization, methodology development, analysis, results interpretation, critical discussion, and conclusion formulation were conducted solely by the author. This work utilized the free OpenAI GPT-4o technology in a nearly negligible capacity. Its application was confined to minor tasks such as paraphrasing, section partitioning, standardizing the reference list, finding synonyms for no more than ten words, and correcting inadvertent typographical errors.

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