

Changing Trends in Research on Turkish Migrants in Germany

Research Thesis

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by

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## Introduction

Turks started immigrating to Germany in the 1960s and 1970s as guest workers, or “Gastarbeiters.” Around 3 to 5 million Turks have moved to Europe in the past few decades, with a majority settled in Germany (Sirkeci & Cohen, 2016). Between 2010 and 2016 about 1.35 million migrants came to Germany, of which about 850,000 were Muslim (Pew Research Center, 2017). A little less than half of these migrants were refugees and about 86 percent of the refugees were Muslim. Today, as more Muslim refugees settle in Germany, there has been a rise in xenophobia among Germans and Turkish migrants often must confront ethnic discrimination (Sirkeci, Cohen & Yazgan, 2012). The goal of this research is to review what topics related to the physical and mental health of first- and second-generation Turkish migrants to Germany are chosen for research and how those topics relate to changes in treatment of Turkish immigrants in Germany since the early 2000s.

Many factors and environmental pressures impact the health of an individual and their community. Broadly these factors can be political, social, economic, ethnic and cultural. When looking at Turkish migrants in Germany, some of the major topics influencing their health and wellbeing include social welfare and emergency care use, physical and cognitive health, smoking, labor market and education integration, familial and intergenerational transmission, a sense of belonging and identity, citizenship and host culture adoption and ethnic retention, return migration intentions, and alienation by the host culture in Germany. I used these topics as domains for research and found that the prevalence of these topics, which appear throughout research on Turkish immigrants in Germany, have shifted from 2001 to 2019.

Originally, I did not intend to address the shift in research topics. I found this significant change after organizing a series of resources on the status of Turkish immigrants in Germany. After surveying work on Turkish migrants who have settled in Germany, what became clear was the increasing pressures, particularly discriminatory pressures, affecting the community and the impacts of those pressures on the health of the community. I later focused on the shift in research topics and contexts in which the research was framed, either looking at Turks compared to other Turks or Turks compared to Germans, and how pressures affecting health arise or are associated with research. I compiled sources by searching for articles on demographics of Turkish migrants in Germany and their health. After finding 29 sources covering different aspects of physical and mental health of first- and second-generation Turkish migrants in Germany, I identified research domains and summarized each. I noted how the information in each article was relevant when looking at its application in the world and how the outcomes in the articles were addressed by the authors. Then I organized the articles by year starting in 2001 and ending in 2019. I looked at major events and changes in Germany in each of those years and discovered how events influenced the research being done and the way issues were addressed.

Since the early 2000s there has been a shift in focus from looking at the culture and health of Turkish migrants in Germany to a need for Turks to assimilate. I also noticed that acculturative pressures and xenophobia influenced issues. Furthermore, issues that were generally seen as health concerns in Germany have slowly become “Turkish problems,” that need to be fixed so Turkish migrants and their children will appear “Germanized.” These themes in shifting research have adverse effects on Turkish migrants, change research and

change German perceptions of Turks in Germany. This creates new problems and issues for Turkish migrants and children of migrants as they navigate life in Germany.

### Status of Turkish Migration to Germany

An increase in the number of Turks migrating to Germany in the 1960s and 1970s was motivated by labor exchange agreements between Germany and Turkey (Sirkeci & Cohen, 2016). These migrants came as guest workers on contracts. Many Germans believed that the Turks who came as the guest workers would return to Turkey at some point. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, the main purpose of migration to Germany changed as Kurdish refugees escaped political oppression. Kurds dispersed around Europe, with the majority going to Germany. These migrants settled in Germany, began their families and there is now a large Turkish community of Turks and German-Turks. The discrimination and xenophobic biases against Turks and Germans of Turkish descent from German natives is in part due to a fear of Turkish migrants entering their country and starting families. Because the largest migrant group in Germany is from Turkey, issues surrounding Turkish migrants in Germany are prominent in the media and politics. This creates controversy over Turkish migration and communities in Germany and makes these individuals and communities a target for xenophobic actions. I argue that the status of Turks in Germany has not changed, but rather the population has grown and in response to this growth, German attitudes towards them have shifted.

## Status of Research on Turkish Migration to Germany

Between 2001 and 2019 the topics of study in research on Turkish migrants shifted. There was a decrease in articles focused on physical and mental health among Turks in Germany. At the same time, there was an increase in articles that compare Turkish and German native health outcomes.

In 2014, there is a noticeable increase in the number of articles that look at the health of Turks in Germany compared to that of German natives. One important topic covered in these articles is smoking. Several articles compare rates of smoking among Turkish men and women to native-born German men and women (Katharine Reiss et. al., 2015). There was a higher number of Turkish smokers than German smokers (Katharine Reiss et. al., 2014) and it was recommended that Turkish smoking rates should be lowered to more closely match those of Germans. This makes smoking a Turkish health issue rather than a general health issue. Turks can be seen as a problem because they are practicing an unhealthy habit. A habit that was initially a "German" trait to be addressed, has become a Turkish problem.

In addition to the shift in the context of the research completed, there was a decrease in the variety of topics covered from the period between 2001 and 2013 and then between 2014 and 2019. Some topics are present in both periods, emergency care and welfare, cognition, belonging and distress and family and intergenerational transmission, and some only in the first, like physical health, and some that appeared in the second, such as return migration intentions. Between 2001 and 2013 there were topics regarding physical health, family and intergenerational transmission, the labor market, education, citizenship and host culture versus ethnic retention, emergency care and welfare, belonging and identity and how it leads to

distress and alienation by the German host culture. Research with the main topic focused on physical health, education, the labor market, alienation by the host culture and citizenship and host culture versus ethnic retention were not present in the articles between 2014 and 2019. However, smoking and return migration intentions were present in that period. The decrease in research variety and representation while the Turkish population in Germany grows leads me to ask why?

#### Summaries of Articles and Periods

Between 2001 and 2019 there are a variety of topics of investigations regarding Turkish migrants in Germany. However, there is a noticeable shift in the research topics and the context in which they are described, and conclusions drawn. Between the years of 2001 and 2013, many of the articles regarding Turkish migrants in Germany compare physical and mental health within the Turkish migrant population and with Turks in Turkey (Figure 1). On the other hand, between 2014 and 2019 there is an increase of research done on Turkish migrants in Germany that compares the health of Turks in Germany to that of native Germans rather than to that of other Turks (Figure 2). The percentage of research in a Turkish context dropped from 81 percent to 50 percent and the percentage of research in a German context rose from 19 percent to 50 percent. In about half of the articles between 2014 to 2019 the health of Turkish migrants and the children of Turkish migrants were compared to the health of Germans. However Turkish migrants face environmental, political and social pressures that Germans do not. These factors impact health in significant ways and must be included when comparing

health outcomes. Germans, unlike Turkish immigrants, do not face discrimination, pressures of acculturation and xenophobia.

Not only did the context in which the research was done change, but the research domains changed as well. Between 2001 and 2013 there was a fairly diverse distribution in research topics and domains (Figure 3). The domain of physical health made up 23.8 percent of research. Research on family and intergenerational transmission, labor market, education, and alienation by host culture included 9.5 percent each; citizenship and host culture versus ethnic retention represented 19 percent; emergency care and welfare 4.8 percent; belonging, identity and distress 9.5 percent; and cognition represented 4.8 percent. In this period there were no articles on smoking or return migration, which becomes an important domain between 2014-2019 (Figure 4). Between 2014 and 2019, smoking made up 25 percent of the research represented. Belonging, identity and distress made up 12.5 percent; family and intergenerational transmission 12.5 percent; return migration intentions included 25 percent; emergency care and welfare was 12.5 percent, and cognition was also 12.5 percent of all research reviewed. In this period certain topics that were present between 2001-2013 are missing, including: physical health, labor market, education, citizenship and host culture versus ethnic retention, and alienation by host culture. While there are articles covering these topics, in my generalized survey they were not present, highly visible or accessible. The shift in contexts and research is not natural and instead reflects how patterns of interest have changed as well as how funding and attitudes are changing.

## Importance of these Trends

These findings show how research is affected by and responds to shifting opinions and changing patterns of state support. Specifically, reviewing these pieces shows how German responses to Turkish migrants and German-Turks impact issues that are critical if Turks are to settle safely. There was a significant change from focusing on Turkish culture and health before 2014. After 2014 the focus on Turks in comparison to German natives in regards to health increased. In addition, a focus on how to “fix” what was assumed to be a Turkish problem reflected a shift in investigation. The average age of Muslims in Germany is younger than that of native Germans and Muslims also have more children on average than Germans (Pew Research Center, 2017). With this in mind, even if migration to Germany stopped, the Muslim population in Germany would continue to grow.

While there are several reasons for the changes in study and positioning of the Turkish community in Germany, I argue that this shift is due at least in part to increasing xenophobia as Germans realize that many Turks do not intend to return to Turkey. A 2011 study on the views of German youth on Turks in Germany found that many German youth did not have negative views on Turks in Germany (Benz, 2012). By 2017, the situation was different. The PRC found that while many Germans have positive views on and attitudes toward refugees, many German adults think more refugees in the country increases the chances of terrorism (Pew Research Center, 2017). Many Germans think that Muslims want to be part of a distinct community and will not adopt German customs or integrate into Germany. This contributes to the increase in funding and research encouraging acculturation of Turks.

A citizenship test for Muslim immigrants put into place in Baden Wuerttenbug in 2006, created political controversy and was debated in the media. The test drew a great deal of criticism (Ramm, 2010). Among outcomes of the test, it “Islamized” Turkish immigrants and brought attention to Turks living in Germany as some politicians and “Islam experts” in academia tried to reform the anti-immigration policies in Germany. On the other hand, politicians can also use the xenophobia present in Germans who fear that refugees and Muslim immigrants increase the likelihood of terrorism to fuel anti-immigration agendas, therefore inspiring more xenophobia and distrust of Muslim and Turkish immigrants. Different themes or research should be targeted to fix problems and depoliticize the portrayal of migrants and refugees. This in turn will affect health and wellbeing and sense of belonging among Turkish migrants in a more positive way.

Figures

Research Trends on Turkish Migrants in Germany 2001-2013

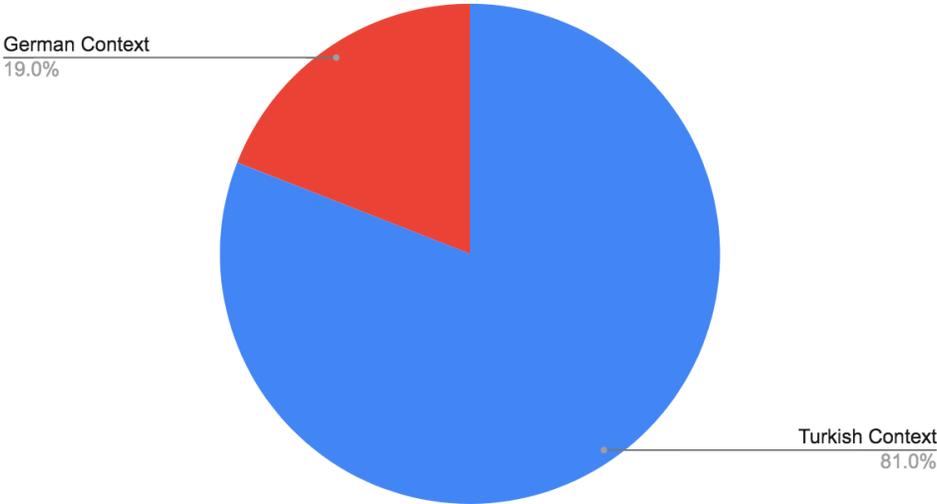


Figure 1: Research Trends on Turkish Migrants in Germany 2001-2013

Research Trends on Turkish Migrants in Germany 2014-2019

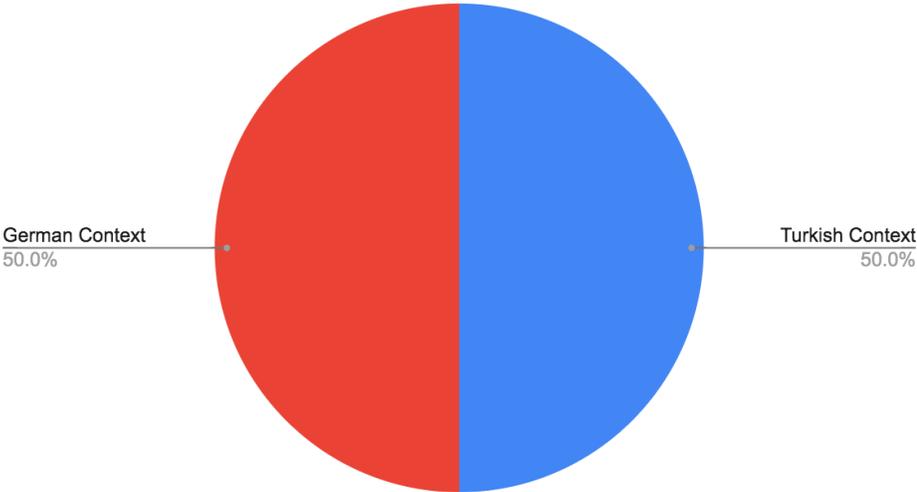


Figure 2: Research Trends on Turkish Migrants in Germany 2014-2019

### Distribution of Research by Topic 2001-2013

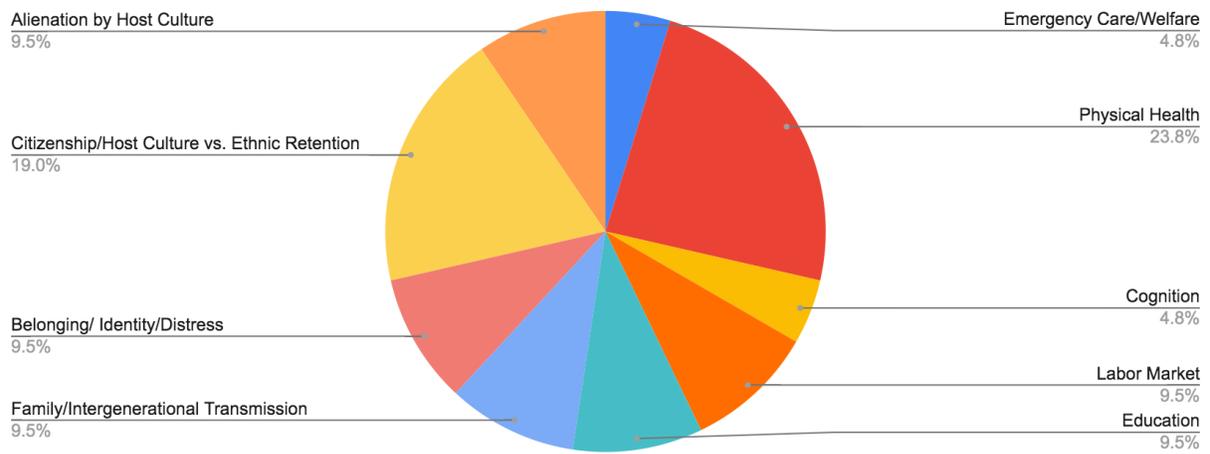


Figure 3: Distribution of Research by Topic 2001-2013

### Distribution of Research by Topic 2014-2019

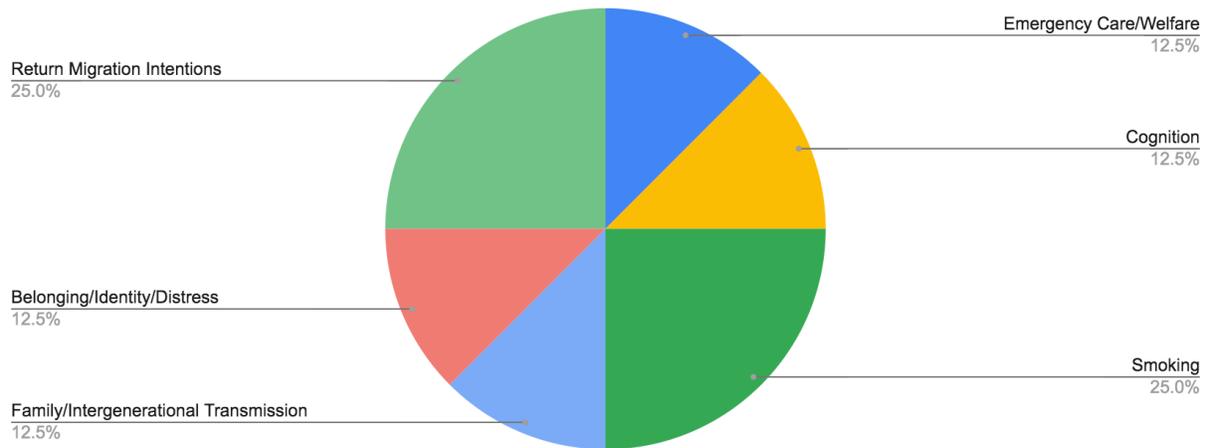


Figure 4: Distribution of Research by Topic 2014-2019

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