

Abstract for the *European Population Conference*, June 13th-16th, 2012 in Stockholm, Sweden

Title: **The health status of Turkish immigrants in Germany**

Author: Annelene Wengler

Contact details: Annelene Wengler
SOCLIFE research training group, University of Cologne
Richard-Strauss-Str. 2
50931 Cologne, Germany
e-mail: wengler@wiso.uni-koeln.de

Extended Abstract

At the end of October it will be 50 years since the German and Turkish government signed the *Anwerbeabkommen* – a contract to send Turkish workers to Germany. This ensured a large influx of workforce in the following years. Initially workers should come to Germany on a rotating basis which was soon abandoned since it neither suited the employees nor the economic goals of the employers. Therefore, the so-called *Gastarbeiter* or guestworker soon became permanent residents and family members followed to Germany. Due to a recession the German government stopped recruiting Turkish workers in 1973, but family members still followed to Germany for some time. Today Turks form the largest immigrant group in Germany, with about 2.5 Million people with Turkish migrant background living there.

In general, when studying immigrants we often compare them to the native population within a country. This comprises one major problem: we compare two highly heterogeneous groups which in general seem to have only few things in common. This holds true for studies in Germany as well as research done in different European countries. In our study we focus on Germany. Comparing Turkish immigrants and German natives shows that the immigrants are on average younger, have a lower educational level, and earn less income. Additionally, they vary with regard to living and working conditions. Therefore comparing them should be done with caution and by using complex statistical models which incorporate different relevant characteristics. One way of doing so is by applying propensity score matching.

Propensity score matching is often used in clinical trials or economic research, up to now it is not widely used in social sciences. On a basis of regression models each individual in the two groups under comparison is assigned a propensity score. Based on this score only *similar* individuals of both groups – Turkish immigrants and German natives – are matched and hence compared to each other. There are different possibilities to specify the matching models (Caliendo & Kopeinig 2008).

The study at hand focuses on the *health status* of Turkish immigrants currently residing in Germany. Previous results in the field are rather inconclusive and do not clearly indicate a better or worse health status of immigrants compared to German natives. Also due to data restraints the health status of immigrants in Germany could only be observed scarcely in the past. In our study we use data from the Generations and Gender Survey (2005/2006) which includes a sufficiently large sample of Turkish immigrants and German natives. The matching of Turkish immigrants and German natives is based on socio-demographic, socioeconomic characteristics, health burdens and coping resources. More precisely we base our matching procedure on: age, sex, residential region, educational level, employment status, limited/unlimited work contract, satisfaction with housing, religious participation, social support, sense of control over life, and trust towards others. Besides comparing the self-rated health status of the individuals we use the prevalence of chronic conditions/longstanding illness and health-related limitations in daily activities to explore differences in health status.

When using matching methods no differences in health status can be observed between the two groups. More precisely: this shows, that the differences between Turkish immigrants and German natives which are observed in other studies (and by applying regular regression models to the data) might simply be a matter of differences in socioeconomic status and the allocation of resources. This also indicates that there is no independent effect of migrant status on health. To check if these results are robust the European Social Survey is used as a second data source. Furthermore, we differentiate between first and second generation immigrants in the Generations and Gender Survey. This allows for thoroughly analyzing the special situation of second generation immigrants, which comprise characteristics of two different societies. The results for this comparison are still preliminary.

Caliendo, Marco & Kopeinig, Sabine (2008). Some practical guidance for the implementation of propensity score matching. *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 22(1), 31-72.