



Migration, Urban Poverty and Underclass - “Working in the Garbage”

Hakan Acar, Seyhun Akar, Gürhan Akdemir, Ulaş Aksakalli, Yılmaz Alataş, Mehmet Engin, Hacettepe University School of Social Work

With its socio-cultural and economic indicators and its location, Turkey has a contradictory social structure. At one hand, Turkey is one of the leading economies in the world. IMF (International Monetary Fund) informed that Turkey was the 21st biggest economy in 2004. It also indicated that Turkey would be the 17th biggest economy in 2006. It means Turkey will have a bigger economic power than Taiwan, Belgium or Switzerland.

In contrast to its economic growth, governments of Turkey still fight for eliminating and reducing deep poverty rates. The State Statistic Institute (2004) stated that the number of poor people in Turkey has reached to 20 million in 2003. 23% of families and 37.8% of pre-school children live under poverty line.

People need to find new strategies to cope and manage their lives. In this manner garbage collecting can be considered as a new employment field for the new urban poor in Turkey. Today, thousands of people and their families in Turkey have been involved in garbage collecting process as low-paid workers.

This research aims to present one of the proofs of urban poverty and lack of social regulations towards the new urban poor.

This study is a describing field research regarding the workers who work in city garbage in Ankara, Turkey. Research was conducted with 51 workers in 2003. Data were gathered by using a questionnaire prepared by the researchers. Researchers have used field observations and interviews as a secondary data gathering method in order to provide a rich presentation of results.

At the end of the work, it is revealed that a majority of the workers in Mamak Garbage are adolescent and younger adults and have extremely low educational level. Significant numbers of the workers have immigrated to Ankara within the last 6 months from rural areas of the hinterland of Ankara. It is understood that these workers have been engaged in marginal jobs before. The garbage workers show typical characteristics that apply to members of the underclass. They have been living in poor conditions, generally employed in junk jobs for short-term periods and they continue to have little chance to develop their conditions. This can be characterized as typical poverty cycle. The workers have to work in difficult conditions such as long working hours and lower wages without social insurance.

Introduction: City Garbage as an Employment Field

The city garbage has been transformed into income-producing places in the second half of the 20th century. The economic value has, in a sense, become the indicator of the development level of the country or the region. Indeed, the city garbage contains a large range of materials

ranging from electronics to furniture, plastics to iron and waste food, and surely many of them still have economic yield.

With respect to garbage - as in many other fields - there are differences between developed and underdeveloped countries. For instance, the recycling proportion in developed countries is third times more than the underdeveloped ones.

The city garbage has been a new employment field. Even if it is not possible to give clear figures, it is a fact that many people and their families in Turkey work in the garbage as garbage collectors and decomposers. In recent years, these workers have attracted the attention of the public opinion and there have been some news on the national press regarding the issue.

The following news, regarding the garbage collectors, had been posted in Zaman Newspaper, on 14th July 2002. "The children of low income families spend their summer holidays by working. The economic crisis has increased the number of these children. They earn money by collecting garbage in the suburban district of Turgut Ozal in Manisa. They wake up at 5 am every morning and cycle to the 2 km far away city centre on their bicycles bought by the money they earned from the garbage". Radikal Newspaper announced on 28th November 2000 that collecting garbage had been in the interest of the mafia. "Garbage cocks! Now there is a mafia of garbage. Mafia gives permission and the poor earns multiples of the minimum wage by decomposing the garbage. Turkey is ahead of the UK in recycling". The latest news on the garbage collector children was on Hürriyet on 6th April 2005. "The explosive material in the sacks carried by children who collect junk from the military zones has blasted. The 7 wounded children were removed to private hospitals around. Two of them then were removed to Istanbul University Faculty of Medicine Hospital".

As it is seen, the income has been gradually increasing of the garbage collection in the city centers as well as the city garbage and bearing in mind the socio-economic conditions of the country, garbage collection has increasingly been a rentable job for more people.

The Background and Social Dynamics of Working in the Garbage in Turkey

Transformation of Social Structure of Turkey: From Rural to Urban...

Terms such as "working on the garbage" and "surviving on collecting the garbage" are prevalent and took part in the public opinion since the end of the 1990's. In order to understand the social dynamics of garbage collecting and working on the garbage, one must analyze the transformation of social structure in the last fifty years. The swift transformation of the social structure in Turkey is well linked to the political movements in the 1950's. This period started in the 1950's when the multiparty political system was started. In this period, the state started to apply open market rules instead of a state controlled capitalism. As a result of the changing economic policy, investments of the private sector have become widespread in the big cities especially in the Western Anatolia in order to maximize profits.

The basic characteristic of capitalism is "unequal development". In this process, some regions became more attractive such as Istanbul, İzmir, and their hinterlands, and thousands of people began to immigrate to these attractive places in order to have a chance to be employed or/and to have better living conditions. Cities such as Istanbul, İzmir, Mersin, and Adana have been the main actors of this structure. In short, the transformation of society during the 1950's caused mass immigration from rural areas to the bigger cities (Atauz 1990: 5).

The urban population rose from 18.3% in 1945 to 18.5% in 1950, 22.1% in 1955 and 25.1% in 1960. The urban population nearly doubled only in 20 years of time. The basic problem of this social transformation was that it did not depend on industrial development, in a sense, as a result of a process without the infrastructure. This process which can be called as the “First Migration Wave” in the recent history of Turkey continued in nearly the same speed until the 1970’s.

The second big migration wave appeared during the 1990’s. This one emerged in the same way from the country to the city and even from the East to the West, commenced as a result of the terror incidents in the Eastern and South Eastern of Anatolia. The second migration wave started in 1990 and continued with its full rhythm until 2000. Millions of people in these regions rushed into the nearest city centers or directly to the metropolitan cities in Southern and Western Turkey such as Istanbul, Izmir, Mersin, and Antalya. The population movements in this process can be summarized as follows:

The population in Diyarbakir increased to 1,362,708 in 2000 which was 1,096,447 in 1990. Accordingly the increase rate is 2.173%. This figure is 2.862% in Bursa between 1990 and 2000. The population in Mersin rose to 1,651,400 in 2000 when it was 1,267,253 in 1990. In 2000, the population in Antalya was 1,719,751 however it was 1,132,211 in 1990. Similar figures are encountered for Ankara which attracts migration not only from the Eastern Anatolia but also the Central Anatolia and many places of the Black Sea region: the population of Ankara was 3,236,378 in 1990 and it rose to 4,007,860 in 2000. In this process, new districts with sheltered houses have formed, where thousands of people live in Diyarbakir, Van, Adana and Mersin, and the population of Mersin increased following the migration from 442 thousand to 1 million, of Tarsus from 177 thousand to 350 thousand, Adana from 927 thousand to 2 millions, Diyarbakir from 380 thousand to 1 million, Gaziantep from 600 thousand to 1 million. The dimensions of the social and economic problems created by the migration have increased gradually and the vast majority of the immigrants live in unhealthy conditions (TIHV 1996, p. 133).

In this process the structure of the community has radically changed. Today urban population rose to approximately 65% of the total population in Turkey.

Changing Economic Policies and Transition to Industrial Society: End of the Social Welfare Regime and the Effects of Neo-Liberal Economy

The basic milestones of the economy-politic history in Turkey indicate three periods. First of them is obviously the foundation of the Republic. The foundation of the Republic also presents first steps of transition to industrial society. In the early republican period, Turkey applied a national developmental model which implied state capitalism. The state tried to eliminate gaps and economic inequalities among regions. During these years, the state was the first source of investment for the economic development.

The second period started during the 1950’s when multiparty political system was started. In this period, the state started to apply open market rules instead of a strictly controlled state capitalism.

The last period started in 1980 when the army abolished the Parliament and took the political power. During the military period, Turkey has been connected with international markets and started to integrate with the global capitalist system. Turkey adopted a liberal economic development model which depends on the international loans in this process. In these years

Turkey met IMF and international finance institutions (Acar 2005). In short, the 1980's can be characterized as the substitution of welfare regime through neo-liberal policies. This process has been also visible in many other parts of the world.

As it is known, welfare state regimes aim to distribute national income equally among population groups. After the collapse of welfare state regime, governments have applied neo-liberal economic policies. The process started in UK and USA by Reagan and Thatcher Governments.

Reaganism and its twin sister, Thatcherism, created fortunes among the highly educated, but in the middle and working classes, they generated anxiety, insecurity and disparities. Tax cuts, the slashing of safety nets and welfare benefits, and global free trade unleash the powerful engines of capitalism that go on a tear. Factories and businesses open and close with startling speed. As companies merge, downsize and disappear, the labor force must always be ready to pick up and move on. The cost is paid in social upheaval and family breakdown. Deserted factories mean gutted neighborhoods, ghost towns, ravaged communities and regions that go from boom to bust. Conservatism is being confronted with its own contradictions for unbridled capitalism is an awesome destructive force (Schwartz 1999).

By the effect of the economic policies implied, the balance in income distribution flustered in the cities and big gaps have notably occurred between income groups. Moreover, people who immigrated to the city centers could not develop strategies to adapt the city life and families have come to the point of dissolution, owing to the interruption of the links with the towns. There are two main reasons of this situation. First, the aim of full employment target was denounced when the comprehension of social state was substituted with the liberal economic model.

With neo-liberal policies, which have been dominant in the process of economic globalization, the labor market has radically changed. The maximization of profit became prior for global market even for social organizations. This caused increasing unemployment rates and rising poverty rates. Moreover, the need for unskilled labor has declined as a result of technological developments. Indeed, globalization of economy and neo-liberal strategies started to change the structure of societies.

The effects of neo-liberal policies can be seen in any part of the world. For instance, the economic gap between the poorest and the wealthiest groups in world has become 1/82 while it was 1/30 in the 1960's. Today, 30 million people die in every year because of hunger in World (Başkaya 2000, p. 124).

As it is seen, with the collapse of the welfare state paradigm and the start of the neo-liberal policies, the balance among the social classes has been lost. This has caused the gaps in society get deepened in every single area. The new economic understanding has viewed public services as commercial goods and replaced the term "citizen" with "consumer." Therefore, meeting of the needs such as better education, healthier environment and housing has become the rights of the ones with enough money. In fact, relinquishing of the social welfare state has caused some population groups to be sacrificed. Furthermore, the new economic system has created a new cast system by its regulations which make the poor stay poor. Şengül (2001: 43) explains this as the following:

“While the post Second World War period, which was determined by the Keynesian policies, is described by some researchers as the era of intra-national projects, the post 1980’s period is described as the era of bi-national projects. While the former provides for the groups on the margins keep included in the social project, the later excludes some segments of the society. Thatcher and Reagan have become the leaders of such bi-national projects and made the exclusion of the economically disfunctioning parts of the society as 'parasitic' and 'useless'. In a sense, the bi-national projects have gained the support of the middle class by convincing them that the reason why they paid high taxes was the 'parasitic classes' and the welfare state expenditures for them”.

In this process, it has become almost impossible for the individuals who receive education in state schools with lower quality, cannot learn a foreign language, study in village schools which are full of incapacities in every sense of the word to find a good job. It is clear that the neo-liberal change has been welcomed by only a small minority in a country which is still developing and in which one third of it's population lives under poverty line, namely Turkey.

The neo-liberal regulations in Turkey - and many Latin American and Asian countries which look alike structurally - have intensified the gap between the rich and the poor. This has caused the development of new social class definitions.

Neo-Liberal Society and Underclass: Emergence of Garbage Workers in the case of Turkey

The period in which the neo-liberal approach dominated policies can be defined as the emergence of new poor of urban. It clearly presents the rise of the new class. Scholars call this a "underclass". Myrdal in 1963, described underclass as “the workers who are forced out of a new economy, and now often called postindustrial” (Cited in Martin 2004). Some other authors also defined underclass as “the persons who have hopeless life conditions and little chance to improve their life quality” (Şengül 2001: 44).

In fact, underclass is a concept which is used to describe the poor and uneducated masses that do not have the hope for a better life. As a result of the relinquishing of the social welfare state and the goal of full employment, the limits of life have been determined sharply for these classes. In a social structure where the neo-liberal values are dominant, areas of work for the underclass are determined to a great extent. The underclass may only work in temporary and low paid jobs which may only make them survive and do not give them the opportunity to develop. Many authors define such jobs as “junk jobs”.

Dawson (1996) also stated that wealth is rapidly polarizing, most people are facing the prospect of insecure junk jobs and sinking incomes, and the well-to-do are effectively seceding from society by walling themselves into privately policed fortress communities (Dawson, 1996). As Bihagen (2004) noted that there are many terms used to describe junk jobs such as the below:

Within sociology, and even within economics, there are several ways of distinguishing between “good” and “bad” jobs, where “bad” jobs have been described as dead-end jobs (e.g., Melamed 1995; Rosenfeld 1992; Silverstone & Towler 1984; cf., Kanter 1977), Mc jobs (Ritzer 1998), junk jobs (cf., Esping-Andersen 1990), ghetto jobs (e.g., Truss 1993; Lowe 1987; Hakim 1978), nonstandard jobs (e.g., Kalleberg, Reskin & Hudson 2000), and jobs within the secondary labor market (Piore 1969). A common denominator for these terms is the lack of career opportunities within such jobs although low wages and poor working conditions are characteristics often included as well (see Bihagen, 2004).

As it is seen, a new class in society called underclass grew by changing attitudes and social policies. This process also affected vulnerable groups in Turkey. One of the proofs is the growing unemployment rates and poverty. In the process of mass migration from rural to urban and transition to open market policies in Turkey, it is clear that families who immigrated to cities to escape from poverty, terror and unemployment fell into hopelessness once again. Another reason why the new citizens of cities cannot cope with the city life is the clearly changing employment market. Employers do not need the unskilled labor anymore. As the people immigrating to cities with the second migration wave are generally uneducated and have a low chance to be employed, this minimizes the opportunity for these people to be employed.

The economic policies radically effected lives of people and create huge gaps between population groups.

Today, Turkey still fights for eliminating and reducing deep poverty rates. The State Statistic Institute (2004) stated that the number of poor people in Turkey has reached to 20 Million in 2003. 23% of families and 37.8% of pre-school children live under poverty line. According to the State Statistic Institute, -SSI- (2004), Turkey is a country which has the worst inequitable distribution of income in comparison to the EU countries including the accession ones. The SSI stated that the poorest 20% of the population receive only 6 percent of the total national income while the richest 20% of the population receive 48.3% of the total income.

By the result of this social transformation summarized with its main features, cities filled with individuals who have low education level, live at suburban areas and do not have a place at formal employment market. Thus, unregistered economy has increased and reached to 66 % of grant total volume of economy according to official figures (DİE 2002, p. 254-257).

New residents of the city had had to create new informal employment fields to survive. Gathering garbage and working at garbage was become one of founded new employment fields.

Goal and Method of the Research

The goal of the study is to describe working and living conditions of garbage workers in Ankara. The research also aims to reveal the effect of mass migration from rural to urban, urban poverty and neo-liberal policies on working in garbage.

The research was conducted by using quantitative research design. The research is a descriptive field research.

Research was conducted with 51 workers in 2003. Data gathered by using questionnaire which formed by the researchers. Researchers also used field observations and interviews as a secondary data gathering method in order to provide a rich presentation of results.

In the research, questionnaire was used as a data collection tool. Questionnaire consists of 65 questions and was prepared as to show socio-economic characteristics of the workers in Mamak Garbage. Additionally, interviews made with person from Ankara Metropolitan Municipality and recycling factory in Mamak Garbage Area to understand the structure and administration of the Garbage.

Within the scope of the research, total fifty-one workers were interviewed. Workers who participated to the process of information collecting were informed and the interviews were started after their approval. It was found that there are 75 workers working in garbage, seven of these workers refused to participate to the research, others could not be reached because of various reasons.

The Findings

Mamak Garbage

Data about the Mamak Garbage Area gathered by observations and interviews with persons from Ankara Metropolitan Municipality and garbage recycling factory in Mamak Garbage Area.

Mamak Garbage; was established in the area where a little far from District of Ege in the County of Mamak within the borders of the city of Ankara. According to the “Law About Management of Metropolitan Municipalities”, administrative government of Mamak Garbage belongs to Metropolitan Municipality of Ankara. Mamak Garbage is a very wide area in that garbage wastes collected from central counties of Ankara were stored and appraisable objects within these garbage wastes were collected by garbage decomposers.

In Mamak Garbage, there are two different kinds of working in two different areas for recycling of garbage. In first garbage island, there is a garbage-refining factory which belongs to Municipality but operated by a private company. This factory works by modern garbage refining and processing machinery. The factory was hired for 40 years to a subcontractor company. This subcontractor company gets active with a garbage transformation company whose patent is in Switzerland as partner. Garbage of the counties which are at relatively higher economic level of Ankara, are come to these establishments (Çankaya, Bilkent, Yenimahalle and Konutkent). Garbage collected in a store, are processed in the establishments by bands. At every band, a worker decomposes one type of material. In these establishments, there are two shifts; a group of workers begin work at 09.00 a.m., quit at 18.00 p.m.. Again, a group of workers begin work at 20.00 p.m. and quit at 06.00 a.m. Workers who work for 9 hours daily work for minimum wage. Workers in this establishment take minimum wage and their insurances are processed.

In other garbage island, there are people who collect and decompose garbage. In this area, workers work as groups and every group has a leader. Every group deals with decomposing a separate material. Groups sell waste materials collected during a week to subcontractor company by their leaders; subcontractor company sells them to recycling factories. Money taken for selling material to subcontractor company is shared among group members. But, group leader takes more money from this share. While a part of workers work in this field of garbage live in close settlement areas, another part of them live in barracks within garbage.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Workers

Socio-demographic characteristics of the workers interviewed are given below:

AGE	NUMBER	%
19-28	30	58,8
29-38	8	15,7
39 and over	13	25,5
Total	51	100,0
EDUCATION LEVELS	NUMBER	%
Primary School	31	60,8
Secondary School	8	15,7
High School	10	19,6
Other	2	3,9
Total	51	100,0
CIVIL STATUS	NUMBER	%
Single	20	39,2
Married	31	60,8
Total	51	100,0

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Workers

The basic socio-demographic characteristics of the workers can be summarized as follow:

More than half of the interviewed workers (58.8 %) are at age of 19-28. Important part of the workers (60.8 %) is married. Most of them have extremely low education level (60.8 % have only primary school degree). Interestingly the ratio of them who are 40 years and over old is $\frac{1}{4}$.

More than half of the workers were born in Ankara. The rest of them indicated they were from hinterland of Ankara (especially from villages of Ankara). More than half of the workers (% 52.1) migrated to Ankara after 1999. More interestingly, more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of workers said that they came to Ankara within the year of 2003. According to workers own expressions the basic aim of the immigration to Ankara clearly depends to rural poverty and hope to live better.

“There is nothing to do there (in the village). I have a family. I have to earn money and meet my children's needs”. (25 years old worker)

The data clearly match with the term “underclass”. Firstly the workers have poor educational level. All of them has rural origin and live in poverty. It can be said that the workers are in a typical bereavement loop. It is obvious that the workers are typically uneducated and unqualified as profession and moreover they could not find a place in employment market by their qualifications. Clearly there is little hope to have better conditions for them in “urban life” where neo-liberal values dominated. Additionally, ages of the workers also indicate youth exclusion in Turkey. As young and uneducated persons they have to work in marginal sectors, as a junk worker to manage their lives. Today, unemployment rates become most important problems of governments since 2000’s. According to State Statistics Institute (2003) 10.5% of total population is out of work force because of small size of labor market. Furthermore most of unemployed persons are young citizens including young persons with a university degree. The State informs that almost $\frac{1}{4}$ of young people with university degree are unemployed.

The workers generally live with their families in poor districts of Ankara. All of them stay in rented houses with negative conditions such as lack of water, lack of healthy housing conditions.

Findings about Working Life

Engaging to the sector

An important part of the workers (25.5%) was unemployed before they began to work in garbage. 17.6% of workers expressed that they worked at constructions before; 23.7% of them said that they worked as security guard and worker in textile sector. They generally worked at marginal jobs before they began to work at garbage.

How the workers involved to garbage collecting sector? This is an important question. The answer tells us the story of immigration and hopelessness. According to data gathered, most of the workers (88.2%) expressed that they found this job via an acquaintance or their relatives. The ratio of workers who said that they found the job by their own is only 11.8 %. During the data collection process research team strongly observed that there is regional network in garbage collecting sector. Many of the workers have the same regional origins and they have strong solidarity among each other. If there is an open position in garbage, they are discovering a person from the same region (same city, village or if it is not possible same region) to let them know.

The data revealed that involving the garbage collecting sector consist of three phase including immigration, looking for a job in labor market, hopelessness and involving the garbage collecting sector. The figure below will show the structure.

Accessing the Urban Labor System



Duration of Working in Garbage

Most of the workers (62.8 %) have been working at garbage for 1-3 months. More than 1/3 of interviewed workers expressed that they have been working for 1 month or less. There is only one (1) worker who works at garbage more than 3 months.

As mentioned before, working at garbage has lower social status in modern society. It is natural that most of interviewed workers (70.6 %) expressed that they do not satisfied with their job and workplace. Moreover, most of these workers (88.2 %) noted that the job is “dangerous”. Similarly, 62.7 % of the workers indicated they are looking for a better job at the same time.

It is seen that an important part of the workers feel indisposed for their job. In other words, workers think that their environment/society perceives working at garbage negatively. Most of the workers (80.4 %) expressed that society’s perception is not good or too bad. Because of this, they are trying to find a better job and leave the garbage as soon as possible.

Working Conditions

The subcontractor company pays only “minimum wage” which is less than 300 USD per month. It is clear that it is not an adequate or acceptable wage to survive in urban conditions. Moreover, the workers have no social insurance. They are not even registered to the social security system. Only two workers who are working in a chief position are members of a trade union; on the other hand 88.2 % of the workers expressed, that they want to be member of a trade union.

It is revealed that the workers have to work during long working hours in difficult circumstances. Workers’ daily working hours are approximately 10 hours. On the other hand, it is seen that workers have not any protective clothes except gloves, so that their working conditions and clothes are far away from hygienic conditions.

The data revealed that working in the garbage can be defined as junk job. The working conditions in garbage are completely brutal. The working conditions can be compared with early capitalist periods in France or England. The workers have no social rights in Garbage. In case of illness they can be fired easily. There is a huge hierarchy between workers and chiefs. During the research period it is observed that most of the workers tend to be silent and avoid talking about working conditions and relationships with subcontractor company and chiefs.

The company, aware of living conditions of the workers. The garbage is last chance for them and if a worker does not want to work in garbage anymore it is very easy to find new one.

Conclusion

This research held in Mamak Garbage of Ankara displayed important data about basic characteristics of the workers at Mamak Garbage. Within the scope of the study it is seen that all of interviewed workers have low educational level, most of them migrated to Ankara within past couple of years and did not find a place in formal labor market. It is understood that workers do not satisfy with working at garbage and feel excluded with perception of the society.

It is observed that workers are uninformed about risks and do not have any protective caution. It is obvious that workers who have no social security will be helpless when they face with health problems. It is seen that a lot of workers in garbage search for another job at the same time.

According to the results of the research, it can be said that workers at garbage are one of the poorest groups of the city. It is understood that people who came to metropolitan areas via migration move away from integration possibilities with the city.

While results of the research show basic characteristics of the workers at garbage, it stresses the necessity of examining this matter with the dimensions like people health, human rights and working conditions. To make workers, who have not any social right conscious of especially health risks and social security, comes to order.

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Author's Address:

Res Ast Hakan Acar, B.A.
Hacettepe University
School of Social Work
Fatih Cad. 195 Kecioren
TR-06290 Ankara
Turkey
Tel.: ++90 312-355 21 30/146
Fax: ++90 312-355 57 71
Email: hacar@hacettepe.edu.tr

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