Saadet Türkmen, a social anthropologist at the University of Bern who herself has an immigrant-background, is working on a Swiss National Science Foundation-funded project to examine the context of immigration from one country to another with particular reference to health. "Specifically, I am asking: how do migrants from Turkey in Switzerland experience their health and health problems? Moreover, how do social relations impact the health and illness experience during migration, and conversely, how do health and illness impact on the social relations?"

METHOD

Türkmen’s approach to answering these questions began with an investigation into three areas: the experience of migrant’s health and health problems; the experience of being/becoming migrant and its related health relevance; and the role of social capital, especially in regards to how it contributes to maintaining, restoring or harming health.

After forming hypotheses relating to these topics, Türkmen applied various forms of social and symbolic capital to explore the experience of health and illness among immigrant populations. She also looked into what resources migrants applied for upon their entry, and what social practices they initially adopted when they arrived into Switzerland – including how these practices impacted on their health and illness.

In doing so, she is also sounding out how and why Turkish individuals immigrate to Switzerland from Turkey – an investigation that could have implications far outside the realm of health.

IMPACT

When published later this year, Türkmen’s doctoral dissertation – *Health and Illness Experience among Migrants from Turkey in Switzerland* – will be a pristinely example of social health and migration. In it, she will reflect on her own experience of immigrating to Switzerland, recalling the challenges presented by sociocultural adaptation: "I started to study at the University of Bern in Switzerland because the academic education I completed with distinction in Turkey was not recognised in Switzerland. Trying to establish myself here was a big challenge."

In addition to sharing her experience and preliminary outcomes of her investigations in her dissertation, Türkmen has also detailed them in ‘The Story in the Story of Gule’, a chapter that appeared in the book *Transcultural Psychiatry: Experiences of Experts from the EU*, published 2014. This book chapter examines the social practices of everyday life, and their health effects among migrants from Turkey in German-speaking parts of Switzerland. "The Gule case study shares insider perspectives and provides a brief overview of the life of migrants from Turkey in Switzerland. As a part of my qualitative fieldwork, it illustrates selected aspects of everyday life and their health-related consequences in migration," Türkmen explains. As such, she applied the concepts of social practices and capital; for example, she uses them when discussing the dynamics of how resources are established and converted into different forms of capital in the quest for health.

The greater part of her publications, however, is concerned with the preliminary results of her field research, and their confirmation by experimental results. In particular, the texts draw particular attention to migration-specific social practices that impact health, including arrival, entry and orientation practices in a new country of residence. Striving to get a residence permit, as well as a working permit, and viewing migration within a totally different sociocultural and political framework are all examples of challenges that have a marked impact on health.

Perhaps more importantly, Türkmen’s publications challenge the paradigm surrounding how we talk about health and illness in relation to immigration status. She describes them not as counterparts but as points on a continuum. "This continuum describes an enduring process and offers insights into its diverse stages and intensity rather than merely presenting a simple dichotomy between health and illness,” she shares. By doing so, Türkmen is enabling the scientific community to examine how health and illness overlap, how these characteristics are affected by local and temporary components and, ultimately, how we might use these concepts to improve the health and wellbeing of immigrants.