

Adela Elena Popa / Hasan Arslan /
Mehmet Ali Icbay / Tomas Butvilas (eds.)

Contextual Approaches in Sociology

IASSR

Adela Elena Popa / Hasan Arslan /
Mehmet Ali Icbay / Tomas Butvilas (eds.)

Contextual Approaches in Sociology

IASSR

Zafer Koylu & Sadet Altay

Health Propaganda During The Ataturk Period (1923–1938)

Introduction

The administration of the newly founded Turkish state inherited a population overridden with heavy and widespread health issues (Irmak, 1988). Although in poverty and despair, the new administration began the process of reaching global health standards and revolutionising the nation's healthcare system during the War of Independence (Sungur, 1988). The Ministry of Public Health and Safety (Original: Sıhhat and İçtimai Muavenet Vekâleti), the first formal institution at the ministry level in Turkish history, was founded by a decree issued on May 2, 1920 (Hakimiyeti Milliye, 1920, May 2; TBMM, 1960; Koylu&Altay, 2008). Because the years of war had driven resources to the brink of depletion socially and economically, the country had virtually collapsed. However, from 1923 onwards, the nation began experiencing rapid economic and social developments under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and his genius and master statesmanship (Özgüldür, 2003). Despite the efforts made from 1920–1923, the health conditions and health-related services in the country during the Republic era were highly inadequate. In addition to social illnesses, such as malaria, syphilis, tuberculosis, and trachoma, there were also various problems related to nutrition, maternal and infant care, and environmental health. All these problems threatened a population that had already dwindled due to wars (Sungur, 1964).

After the proclamation of the Republic, the Ministry of Public Health and Safety (Sıhhat and İçtimai Muavenet Vekâleti – Dr. Refik Saydam) took action within the scope of its mandate and initiated measures to solve the current problems in a fundamental manner. One of the most important reasons for the health problems in the country was ignorance and illiteracy (Aydın, 2002). Taking this situation into account and working with limited resources, the ministry attached great importance to health propaganda to raise the level of information and awareness regarding health (Tunca, 1964). Therefore, the Health Minister, Dr. Refik, drew attention to the importance of the propaganda for public health: “Propaganda plays a pivotal role in the challenge of health. We see the importance given to this issue, and the publications and press articles published and distributed to the public are being proliferated in all modern states in a remarkable manner.

Americans, who understand the art of medicine and sanitation, distribute millions of brochures and books to people in an almost lavish way” (Hakimiyeti Milliye, 1926, March 12).

The main educational tools utilised to carry out the propaganda activities in this era were health banners, brochures, signboards, booklets, films, museums, and exhibitions, as well as the local and national press.

In this study, we examine how the health propaganda activities were carried out in the period from 1923–1938 and the tools that were utilised in the process.

1. Health Banners, Brochures, Signposts, and Manuals

Health banners, brochures, signposts, and manuals, all available in both colour and in black and white, were the primary tools that were used for carrying out health propaganda activities. Some of these materials, especially the ones depicting contagious diseases and pandemics as well as some basic health problems, could not be printed in sufficient amounts due to budget constraints. However, the posts prepared in 1925 for malaria and in 1931 for trachoma were reproduced and distributed. The banners and posters that could not be printed due to budgetary restrictions were sent to social and economic exhibitions and thus, were presented at such exhibitions for the use of the public (T.C., 1933). The following are some of the names of the banners that were printed and distributed:

1. Child Life Thermometer, 2. I don't want you to get sick, so do not kiss me, 3. The way of health, 4. The health mule, 5. The 24-hour schedule of a school child, 6. The ways of transmitting typhoid fever, 7. Urging kids for milk, 8. The daily trip of the housefly, 9. Vitamins and the diseases that they provide protection against, 10. The effects of spring and the sun on health, 11. Syphilis in Turkey, and 12. The life of an infant up to one year (BCA.a, 1930; BCA.b, 1930).

The volume of printing of health-related brochures and coloured wall banners increased after 1936 (Frik, 1938). The first series of banners was printed in 1937 and the second series was printed in 1938 (Tunca, 1964).

When required, small booklets called *Risale* (“Manual”) were also utilised for propaganda activities. These booklets were distributed to those regions in which contagious diseases and pandemics were frequently encountered and where organisations dedicated to fighting the diseases were established. In addition to public health centres, where sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis were treated, these booklets, which were printed by the ministry, were also sent to private practitioners, ensuring their distribution to patients. Until 1935, 311,350 copies of these booklets, which included titles such as *Scarlet Fever* and *The Methods Of Protection Against It*, *Advice On Malaria*, *Advice To The Addicts of Sexually*

Transmitted Diseases, Advice To The Public On Trachoma, Stay Young, Advice To Mothers, and What Are House Flies: Their Harm and Diphtheria were duplicated and distributed (BCA. d., 1933; T.C., 1933).

2. Health-Related Films

Using films, which were considered to play a major role in educating the public because they appeal both to eyes and ears, began in 1928 (Health 50, 1972). The movies that the ministry constantly brought from Europe and America were presented to the public in cities and towns provided with movie theatres, to the army, and to students in schools for free (T.C. Sihat., 1942). Until 1937, 16-mm mobile projectors and films were purchased for public use. In addition, by providing simpler films and gas-powered devices to those places where electricity was not available, the presentation of films was made possible there as well (Health 50, 1972; Tunca, 1964). The following list provides the names of some of these films: “Malaria,” “Child Care,” “Once there were three friends,” “The tooth of Tommie,” “Your mouth,” “The fly risk,” “The punishment for omission” (regarding those who were not registered in the civil registry), “The solution for a long and healthy life,” “Sanitised water,” “The importance of the risks of the flu,” “New methods for fighting malaria,” “Syphilis,” “Early diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis,” “The value of breast milk,” “Why does Wille want to take a bath,” and “Getting used to protecting and succeeding in maintaining good health” (BCA.a, 1930; T.C., 1933).

3. Health Museums

The importance of health museums in raising social awareness and promoting good health habits had been well appreciated even before the proclamation of the Republic in 1915. Therefore, Adnan Bey, the Health Director of the Istanbul area at the time, made efforts to create a museum of this sort. Accordingly, Dr. Hamdi Bey was sent to Germany for further investigations on the matter. When he returned to the country in 1917, his work was completed, and finally on July 23, 1918, a museum named The Health Museum (the original name “Hıfzısıhha Müzesi”) was opened in Divanyolu, Istanbul (Tokaç & Topçu, 2011). This museum, which was provided with various facilities, was supervised and rearranged by the Ministry of Health in 1924. Signposts, casts, images, and graphics on health related issues. The first to be displayed in the museum were the documents illustrating contagious and social diseases. Materials to be exposed in other museums, including new museums established/opened after the proclamation of the Republic, were prepared in this museum as well. Using the boards and casts donated by the

Istanbul Health Museum, a smaller scale museum created by the Ankara Turkish Association was presented to the public in 1925 (Hakimiyeti Milliye, 1925, January 28; February 10). In the month of January of the same year, the museum was put under the supervision of the Provincial Health Directorate (Hakimiyeti Milliye, 1925, July 25; BCA.c, 1933).

In 1926, a Health Atlas, which included significant casts and boards from the Istanbul Health Museum (Sihhi Müze Atlası, 1926), was published and, after being reproduced, distributed to the relevant institutions (T.C., 1933).

A total of 85,362 people visited the Istanbul Health Museum and 75,887 people visited the Museum in Ankara until 1932 (BCA.c, 1933). Museums in Konya (Hakimiyeti Milliye, 1926, August 25), Diyarbakır (Akşam, 1929 May 6), Çorum (Cumhuriyet, 1929, July 17), Aksaray, Bursa, İstanbul, Urfa, Ordu, Trabzon, and Giresun were also opened to the public by the special provincial administrations. The intention/purpose of these museums was to increase the health-related knowledge of the public by various casts and explanation boards (T.C., 1933).

4. Health Exhibitions

From time to time, itinerant exhibitions were also organised to provide the public with health information (Tunca, 1964). The materials prepared for that purpose were exhibited both in the country and abroad. In 1930, the Turkish Ministry of Health participated in the Grand Health Exhibition held in Dresden, Germany (Erkan, 1963; Health 50, 1972) by renting a pavilion and presenting some of the available materials from the museums across the country in addition to new materials prepared in line with current programs (T.C., 1933). In 1935, as part of the Sixth National Congress of Medicine, a health exhibition was held at the Ankara Exhibition House. In the exhibition, a sanitised village model, an illuminated map that showed the locations of all the health institutions across the country, boards explaining contagious diseases, and casts were displayed (Ulus, 1935, October 8, 13, 18). It was then decided to move the exhibition to İzmir, transferring all of its materials (including the banners, images, photos, statistics, etc.). The exhibition was opened on September 1, 1936 (Ulus, 1936, August 16).

5. Local and National Press

The main aim of the ministry was to change public misconceptions and beliefs regarding health issues and to ensure that the public is accurately informed. Therefore, both the local press and the national press were used effectively and efficiently in the propaganda activities. The following list contains some of the articles' names

that were penned in the local press and predominantly featured information regarding contagious diseases: Kızılırmak Newspaper: “Child Health and Sanitation” (Kızılırmak, 1927, January 22). Erzurum Newspaper: “Marshlands,” “The importance of protecting the children,” “The alcohol madness,” “Protecting child health and its benefits,” “Health advice from a practitioner,” and “Typhoid fever” (Erzurum, 1933, 1934, 1938). Yeni Tokat Magazine: “Malaria, flux, typhus: how can we protect ourselves from contagious diseases” (Yeni Tokat, 1934, 1935).

In the national press, it was possible to find articles with similar titles. The following examples are an illustration of this fact: Akşam Newspaper: “The fight against tuberculosis,” “The fight against scarlet fever,” “The measures to be taken in case of scarlet fever,” “Heroin is a poison that causes tremendous damage,” “Morphine, heroin, and cocaine,” “The health of children,” and “Typhoid fever and ways to prevent it” (Akşam, 1931, 1932, 1933, 1934).

Cumhuriyet Newspaper: “The child and communicable diseases,” “How should we fight against tuberculosis,” “Cancer is not communicable,” and “Protecting children against chronic diseases” (Cumhuriyet, 1929, 1933, 1936). Zaman Newspaper: “What is diphtheria and how it is treated” (Zaman, 1935).

Conclusion

The new Republic of Turkey, which took over an underdeveloped health system, attached great importance to health and health services. Among the first measures in dealing with this situation was the foundation of the Ministry of Health. Its main purpose was to determine and solve health related problems. Despite the poor conditions during the War of Independence, both the health institutions and their employees made extraordinary progresses. Great importance was given to health and hygiene, both on the front lines and behind the lines.

With the proclamation of the Republic, a transformation occurred at a large-scale in many fields, and among them, in the field of health as well. In addition to the newly founded health institutions and the better trained health personnel, great importance was also attached to raising public awareness. To this end, banners, brochures, signboards, posts, and booklets were printed and distributed across the country. Films, brought from Europe and the United States, were presented to the public within the constraints of limited resources. With the newly established health museums and health exhibitions, a different method of educating the public was created. The local press and the national press were utilised in every stage of this process.

The health propaganda activities carried out during the first 15 years of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk’s leadership were just a small part of a huge process

that revolutionised the health system. Thanks to those attempts to raise public awareness in health related issues, a sound nation was created out of a society that had been torn apart by war.

References

A. Documentary and Archival Sources

- BCA. b, Fund Code: 30.10.00., Place No: 177.220.18.39, 1930.
 BCA. c, Fund Code: 30.10.00., Place No: 176.218.11.80, 1933.
 BCA. d, Fund Code: 30.10.00., Place No: 176.218.11.81, 1933.
 Prime Ministry Republic Archive (BCA) a, Fund Code: 30.10.00. Place No: 177.220.18.38, 1930.
 Sanitory Museum Atlas (1926). Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.
 Sanitory Museum Guide (1924). Ankara: Ankara Province Press.
 TBMM Recording Protocol (1960). Vol. 1. Ankara.

B. Periodicals

- Child and Chronic Diseases. (1929, 28 May). Cumhuriyet.
 Cancer is not Chronic. (1933, 25 January). Cumhuriyet.
 Diphtheria. (1934, 1 December). Yeni Tokat.
 Fighting Tuberculosis. (1931, 3 April). Akşam.
 Fighting Scarlatina. (1932, 27 November). Akşam.
 Hakimiyet-i Milliye. (1926, 12 March).
 Health Advices from a Doctor. (1934, 8 December). Erzurum.
 Heroin Is a Devastating, Destructive Poison. (1933, 11 April). Akşam.
 How to Fight Tuberculosis. (1929, 14 July). Cumhuriyet.
 Importance of Protecting Children. (1934, 16 April). Erzurum.
 Let Us Know The Protection From Contagious Diseases. (1935, 1 February). Yeni Tokat.
 Madness of Drinking. (1934, 14 May). Erzurum.
 Madness of Drinking. (1934, 21 May). Erzurum.
 Malaria. (1934, 18 October). Yeni Tokat.
 Marshes. (1933, 17 April). Erzurum.
 Morphine, Heroin, Cocaine. (1933, 17 October). Akşam.
 Opening of Sanitary Museum. (1925, 28 January). Hakimiyet-i Milliye.

- Organization of Sanitary Museum In Konya. (1926, 25 August). Hakimiyet-i Milliye.
- Precautions against Scarlatina. (1932, 28 November). Akşam.
- Protection of Child Health. (1927, 22 January). Kızılırmak.
- Protect Children From Chronic Diseases. (1936, 4 August). Cumhuriyet.
- Protection of Child Health and Benefits. (1934, 20 August). Erzurum.
- Purulent Meningitis. (1934, 15 November). Yeni Tokat.
- Sanitary Matters Museum. (1925, 10 February). Hakimiyet-i Milliye.
- Sanitory Museum in Diyarbakir. (1929, 6 May). Akşam.
- Sanitary Museum. (1925, 27 July). Hakimiyet-i Milliye.
- The Health of Children. (1934, 13 April). Akşam.
- Typhoid and Protection Remedies. (1934, 13 September). Akşam.
- Typhoid (Camp Fever). (1938, 18 December). Erzurum.
- Ulus. (1935, 8 October).
- Ulus. (1935, 13 October).
- Ulus. (1935, 18 October).
- Ulus. (1936, 16 August).
- What Is Diphtheria and How Does It Transmit? (1935, 3 March). Zaman.

C. Books and Articles

- Aydın, E. (2002). Health Organization History in Turkey. Ankara: Naturel Press.
- Erkan, A. R. (1963). Forty Years in Health Education and Works of Publication (1922–1962). Ankara: Ankara Printing and Bindery.
- Fifty Years In Health Care (Health 50) (1972). Ankara: Ayyıldız Printing House.
- Frik, F. (1938). Movements of Health Protection and Medicine in Republic of Turkey 1923–1938. Germany: Universum Press.
- Irmak, Y. (1988). Our Health Policy In The Period of Refik Saydam. *In Memory of Dr. Refik Saydam 60th Year*. Ankara: Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.
- Koçlu, Z., & Altay, S. (2008). Foundation of Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and Legislative Regulations Committed. *I Notice Book of International Turkish Medicine History Congress*, Vol. 2. (pp. 1061–1082).
- Sungur, C. A. (1988). Dr. Refik Saydam's Health Care Manner. *In Memory of Dr. Refik Saydam 60th Year*., Ankara: Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.
- Tokaç, M., & Topçu, İ. (2011). A Public Health Problem Belonging to the First Years of the Turkish Republic: High Heels. *Lokman Hekim Journal*, 1(2) (pp. 28–32).

- Tunca, Y. (Ed). (1964). Forty Years of Health Care. Ankara: Ongun Kardeşler Print House.
- Turkish Republic's Ministry of Health and Social Welfare Sanitary Matters Journal Magnificent Sample in Sacred Memory of Dr. Refik Saydam (1942). Ankara: Ulusal Print House.
- Turkish Republic's (T.C.) Ministry of Health and Social Welfare Sanitary Matters Journal Magnificent Sample (29 October 1933) Decennary Work of Ministry (1933). İstanbul: Hilal Print House.

D. Internet Sources

<http://www.tdk.gov.tr/>