



Coping strategies among internal migrant students in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This article is based on a qualitative study that explored educational challenges and coping mechanisms of internal migrant girls whose families moved from the rural areas in the east to the western parts of Turkey. The study revealed that internal migrant girls have encountered a number of challenges that influence their educational achievement at primary schools. From the perspective of migrant girls, the emerging themes included adaptation, language, low socio-economic background, peer relations, discrimination, bullying and self-esteem. The study also confirmed that migrant girls showed resilience in the face of substantial difficulties and developed a variety of coping mechanisms in an effort to overcome their hardships. Five mechanisms were identified by the study: resort to significant others, academic orientation, forming solidarity groups, cloning identities and withdrawal. The article underlines that analysing education-related concerns and coping strategies of migrant girls is required in order to develop effective and relevant intervention programmes on behalf of students.

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1. Introduction

Migration is one of the defining global issues in the twenty first century. Although recent debates on migration tend to focus on international migration, internal migration is far more significant in terms of number of people involved. Evidence suggests that, except for a few countries, internal migration is on the rise (Deshingkar & Grimm, 2005). Studies on internal migration focused on a variety of issues covering its scope, causality and impact on a number of areas, including poverty alleviation, economic development, housing, family structure and health. Nevertheless, within the education field, studies on internal migration remain to be uncommon (Hashim, 2007; Valverde & Vila, 2003). The available studies that seek to explore the connections between internal migration and education mainly focus on education as a pull or push factor of migration or access of internal migrant children to formal and non-formal education (Beauchemin, 1999; Guncer et al., 1995; Hashim, 2007; Kozoll, Osborne, & Garcia, 2003; Punch, 2002). Therefore, schooling experiences of migrant children and youth, their education-related challenges and coping strategies are under-researched.

Internal migration has been a significant phenomenon in Turkey since the 1950s. Due to Turkey's geographical size (larger than the United Kingdom and France combined) and the ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity of its 70 million people, internal migrants in Turkey mirror many characteristics of international migrants elsewhere. This article is based on a broader study that looked at educational challenges of internal migrant girls in Turkey. The study has shown that migrant girls encounter a variety of difficulties in their new school environment, and they also show resilience by adopting a number of strategies to overcome their hardships. This article will first present a brief overview of educational challenges of internal migrant girls

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studying at primary schools in Turkey, and then will focus on their coping strategies. The main research question addressed throughout the article is: How have the migrant girls attempted to overcome their education-related challenges?

2. Contextual background

2.1. Internal migration in Turkey

Internal movement of people is an ancient phenomenon in Turkey, yet the rapid industrialisation process of the 1950s has introduced a new wave of migration from the poorest agricultural Anatolian regions in the east to the richest manufacturing regions in the west, such as the Marmara, the Aegean and the Mediterranean. Additional factors, such as the mechanisation of agriculture, rapid population increase, relatively limited amount of cultivated land, and wide sectoral and regional differences in productivity were also influential in migration movements (Franz, 1994). Furthermore, between 1980s and early 1990s, state of emergency was declared in Eastern and South-eastern Anatolian regions due to increased security concerns as a result of armed attacks by a secessionist terrorist organisation. Consequently, many families were compelled to migrate elsewhere as the state of emergency status made the provinces less attractive to live and earn a living. Migration from rural areas was also encouraged by the authorities (Kirdar & Saracoglu, 2007; Tansel, 2002).

As a result of the accelerated migration movements, the urban population, which was 28.8% in 1955, reached 65.1% in 1997 (DeSantis, 2003), and to 70, 5% in 2007 (Turkish Statistical Institute). Studies explored numerous aspects of migration, including causes of migration (Tunali, 2000), housing and quality of life (Hemmasi & Prorok, 2002), acculturation (Phalet & Hagendoorn, 1996), identity and integration (Erman, 1998). The mainstream literature, however, appeared to be male-oriented (Erman, 1997) and focused on adults. Effects of migration on children and their education still remain to be areas that have been rarely explored.

2.2. Education system

The current education system consists of four levels: pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education. Formal education is free of charge in public schools at all levels except for higher education. Primary education is compulsory and it was increased from five to eight years in 1997. Private schools are very common and are available at all levels for substantially high tuition and fees. Typically, only upper-middle to upper-class families can afford to place their children in private schools where the education is perceived to be of high quality.

According to the most recent statistics, more than ten million students are enrolled at public and private primary schools in the 2007/2008 academic year. The number of teachers at this level is reported to be 450 000. The net enrolment rate is 97.37% at primary and 58.56% at secondary level in the same academic year (Turkish Statistical Institute). There is a very slight gender difference at the primary level; however, the difference increases after primary as the number of girls enrolled at higher educational institutions decrease. Considerable gender differences continue to exist even at primary level in rural areas and in less developed regions, including Black Sea, East Anatolia and South-east Anatolia. Research indicates that girls who have less educated parents have less chance to further their educational attainment. Likewise, girls whose mothers are working and who have younger siblings are less likely to continue with their studies. Education of girls is also contested by some parents, particularly fathers, who maintain fundamentalist Muslim beliefs and favour traditional gender roles (Aytac & Rankin, 2004).

3. The study

3.1. Participants

The research was carried out in 2003 in a suburban town, in the western part of Turkey. Seventy-two participants, both migrant and non-migrant took part in the study. The sample included nineteen migrant and eight non-migrant primary school students, seven teachers, nineteen migrant parents, and eight community members. In addition, eleven graduates, persons who completed their primary education at the same town school, also took part in the study. They will be referred to throughout the article, as graduates.

Both migrant and non-migrant students were selected from the sixth through eight grade levels; their age range was between eleven and fourteen. The rationale behind the age range of sample selection was the fact that this period is a crucial transitional phase between childhood and adolescence, and also induces the development of abstract and critical thinking (Harter, 1999). Due to gender emphasis of the study, school age participants included only girls. The provinces and regions that migrant girls came from were mixed. Five of them identified themselves as ethnically Kurdish. Graduates were a mixed group by gender: seven females and four males, aged between fifteen and thirty-six. They did not identify themselves with any ethnic group other than Turkish. Their education level varied; some completed university and others were still enrolled in high school. Sixteen mothers and three fathers participated in parent interviews. Mothers were specifically chosen to voice their experiences and underscore their involvement in the education of their daughters. A more practical concern was related to the difficulty of finding fathers at home during the day when data collection had to occur. Parent participants' age range was between thirty and fifty-five. Their background in terms of original residence was mixed; three defined themselves as ethnically Kurdish and four as Laz.

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