The reasons why children work on the streets: A sample from Turkey

Kader Mert [a,*], Hasibe Kadıoğlu [b]

[a] *Department of Community Health Nursing, Kocaeli University, Kocaeli, Turkey*
[b] *Department of Community Health Nursing, Faculty of Health Science, Marmara University, Istanbul, Turkey*

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of children working on the streets is a societal issue in all underdeveloped or developing countries just as it is in Turkey. The purpose of this research was to examine the reasons that children work on the street by conducting individual in-depth interviews with working children and their mothers, choosing individuals from similar socioeconomic demographic backgrounds and making a comparison of their acceptance or rejection of working, the perception of social support received by the mothers, and their problem-solving skills. The research was a mixed study that used both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The research was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, quantitative comparisons were made of the problem-solving skills of and social support received by the mothers of children working on the streets (n = 37) and non-working children (n = 35) and of the parental acceptance or rejection/control status of working children (n = 41) and non-working children (n = 41). In the second stage, the reasons children were working on the streets were evaluated qualitatively with seven children who were working on the streets and nine mothers. The Child/Adolescent Parental Acceptance–Rejection/Control Questionnaire, the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, the Problem-Solving Inventory, and individual interview questionnaires were used as data collection tools. The social support and problem solving skills of the mothers with children working on the streets were lower than those of the mothers whose children were not working. The main themes and sub-themes that stood out at the end of the research were socioeconomic and political factors, environmental factors, cultural factors and family factors.

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1. Introduction

Poverty in the world is steadily increasing and inequalities in income distribution are deepening. While poverty and unemployment adversely affect public health, the number of child laborers is also growing daily. The International Labor Organization (ILO) has identified the worst types of childhood labor in the world as existing in seven sectors; crop agriculture, fishing and aquaculture, domestic work, manufacturing, mining and quarrying, construction associated industries, the service sector and street work (ILO, 2011). Although there is no figure available to indicate the total number of children who work and live on the streets around the world, estimates say that this figure could be in the vicinity of 10 million (UNICEF, 2006a). The estimate of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) on the number of children living and working on the streets in Turkey is about 42,000 (UNICEF, 2006b). Studies conducted on children working on the streets report that 79.2% of these children are exposed to physical abuse by various persons and groups (Bilgin, 2009), 29.9% are "slightly" or "moderately" malnourished (Duyar, 2007), 23.4% are likely to have picked up the habit of smoking, while 77.1% are reported to have at least one medical problem (Sasmaz,

Bugdayci, Ugurhan, Soner, & Kurt, 2006), but that only 14.3% are able to get treatment (Acar, 2010). The solution for this issue, one that threatens children and their families as well as public health, is hidden in the reasons children work on the streets in the first place.

Among the reasons cited to explain why children work on the streets are poverty (Acar, 2010; Alptekin, 2011; Altuntas, 2003; Bilgin, 2009; Cakir, 2009; Erbay, 2008; Gun, 2010; Omokhodion, Omokhodion, & Odusote, 2006; Yildiz, 2007), migration (Acar, 2010; Alptekin, 2011; Altuntas, 2003; Cakir, 2009; Kocadas & Ozgur, 2011), unemployment (Bal Yilmaz & Dulgerler, 2011), but other factors can be said to include social and cultural reasons (the attitude of the parents regarding child labor, insufficient information about children's needs and rights) (Erbay, 2008; Karaman & Ozcalik, 2007), peer influence (Alptekin, 2011; Kocadas & Ozgur, 2011), neglect and exploitation in the family (Catak & Bozkurt, 2010), the insufficiency in the support provided by social services institutions (Altuntas, 2003; Erbay, 2008; Sallan Gul & Gul, 2006), and the fact that street jobs are usually unregistered and need little or no capital (Altuntas, 2003). Research with children working on the street has shown that mothers play a key role in the issue. Most children hand their pay over to their mothers (Alptekin, 2011; Altuntas, 2003). The insufficient amount of social support the mothers of child street laborers receive (Cakir, 2009; Hatipoglu, 2009), their desperation in the face of poverty (Gun, 2010), and the low level of problem-solving skills in women of poverty-stricken households

* Corresponding author at: Kocaeli Universitesi Umuttepe Kampusu, Izmit/Kocaeli, Turkey. Tel.: +90 2623037801; fax: +90 2623037803.
E-mail address: kgurbuz@kocaeli.edu.tr (K. Mert).

(Kosgeroglu, Ayranci, Serhan, Ozerdogan, & Sayiner, 2009) are some of the reasons that have been set forth. In poor families that do not have the needed social support, there is a risk that children will experience a lack of love and affection (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002). Children that are exposed to an absence of love and to family violence (Catak & Bozkurt, 2010; Subası Baybuga & Kubilay, 2003) risk being renounced by their parents. The support of the family plays an important role in preventing children from working outside the home. For this reason, the mothers' perception of the level of social support that they are receiving (Cakir, 2009), their problem-solving skills (Baykan & Temel, 1995) and relations between children and their parents (Conticini & Hulme, 2007) are factors that must be taken into consideration. Research into children that work and live on the streets delves more into exclusively quantitative data, preventing an in-depth and comprehensive evaluation of the issue (Altuntas, 2003). It was for this reason that qualitative and quantitative techniques were used together to analyze the reason children work on the streets in this study. The aims of this study were to assess the acceptance/rejection status of parents that allow or do not allow their children to work on the streets, using a sample of participants in the province of Kocaeli who are of similar socioeconomic background, to compare the social support received by the mothers of child street-laborers and mothers of children not allowed to work on the streets, as well as the problem-solving skills of the mothers, based on an in-depth individual analysis of working children and their mothers through individual in-depth interviews in order to examine the reasons children work on the streets.

2. Methods

2.1. The study location and setting

The study was conducted over the period May 2011–July 2012. Because the province of Kocaeli is an industrial area, it is one of the provinces in Turkey that attracts the most migrations. The neighborhood in the district of Izmit, where the study was carried out, is an area to which people have migrated from Turkey's eastern and southeastern provinces; it is also an area that has a concentration of child laborers working on the streets. According to the records of the Center for Children and Youth in Kocaeli Province, a total of 44 children work on the streets in this neighborhood.

2.2. The study participants

The scope of the study included 35 mothers whose children were not working on the streets and 41 children of families living in the same neighborhood who had not been issued poverty papers (an official document attesting to the family's status of destitution) from the local administration, as well as 40 mothers with children working on the streets and 44 working children that had been registered at the Center for Children and Youth. (The reason that the number of children did not match the number of mothers was that some mothers had more than one child.) Two children had moved away from the neighborhood and one child's mother knew no Turkish so these three children and their mothers were excluded from the study (37 mothers, 41 children). The qualitative data in the study were obtained from individual in-depth interviews held with 9 mothers living in the neighborhood whose children were working on the streets and had consented to participate in the study and 7 children who worked on the streets.

2.3. Data collection

The qualitative data were collected with a voice recorder at individual in-depth interviews conducted during home visits. The interviews lasted from a half-hour to forty-five minutes. The first author carried out the discussions at the homes of the individual participants. Mothers were first asked the question, "How did your child start to work on the streets?" and children were asked, "How did you decide to work on the street?" after which the interview continued with other open-ended questions. The interview was terminated at the data saturation point.

The quantitative data were collected with the scales used in the study and on the basis of self-reporting. The researcher read out the questions to the mothers in the group who could not read or write. The C/A PARQ Mother and Father Forms and the Socio-demographic questionnaire were filled out by the children. The MSPSS and PSI were filled out by the mothers. Fathers were not asked to fill out any questionnaire.

2.4. Research instruments

The data collection instruments used in the study were the Sociodemographic Questionnaire, the Child/Adolescent Parental Acceptance–Rejection/Control Questionnaire (C/A PARQ), the Problem Solving Inventory (PSI), and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS).

2.4.1. Child/Adolescent Parental Acceptance–Rejection Questionnaire (C/A PARQ)

The C/A PARQ was developed by Rohner, Saavedra, & Granum, 1978 for the purpose of evaluating "perceived" acceptance and rejection in the relations children, ages 9–17, had with their parents (Rohner et al., 1978). The questionnaire was filled out separately by both mothers and fathers. The questionnaire evaluating perceived acceptance–rejection in relations with the father is named "Father C/A PARQ" and the questionnaire assessing perceived acceptance–rejection in relations with the mother is titled "Mother C/A PARQ." C/A PARQ is comprised of 60 items and four subscales. These are the (1) Perceived Warmth/Affection Subscale, (2) Perceived Hostility/Aggressiveness Subscale, (3) Perceived Indifference/Neglect Subscale, and the (4) Perceived Undifferentiated Rejection Subscale. The total scores on these four sub-scales on Acceptance and Rejection indicate the individual's perception of their being "accepted or rejected by their parents." Scores are expressed within a range of 60–240. While a level of 60 points indicates the highest perception of acceptance, the level of 240 points represents the highest perception of rejection. The C/A PARQ is a Likert-type scale on which items are marked as "almost always true" (4 points), "sometimes true" (3 points), "rarely true" (2 points), and "almost never true" (1 point). Rohner later added a second dimension to the assessment of parental acceptance and rejection in children's relations with their parents, re-naming the C/A PARQ as a "Parental Acceptance–Rejection/Control Questionnaire." The Control subscale is made up of thirteen items. The Control subscale was developed for the purpose of measuring a child's perception of the control wielded by his/her parents. This subscale is evaluated completely separate from the C/A PARQ. Possible scores on the Control subscale are in the range of 13–52. Scores of 13–26 points indicate "low control," 27–39 points, "moderate control," 40–45 points, "firm control," and 46–52 points, "strict control." The validity and reliability studies for the control sub-scale were performed by Rohner and Brothers (1999). The C/A PARQ has been translated into more than 26 languages and used in 230 studies in 60 countries (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002). The reliability and validity studies of PARQ in Turkey were done by (Polat, 1988) and (Erdem, 1996) for the child version. The reliability and validity tests performed on the C/A PARQ in Turkey were conducted by Varan and the results obtained have shown that the scale represents a valid and reliable interpretation of the perception of children in Turkey regarding the acceptance–rejection of their parents (Varan A. 2003. Assessment of parental acceptance and rejection in Turkish children. Ege Üniversity, Izmir; unpublished study). In this study, Cronbach Alpha values were at a good level (Table 1).

2.4.2. Problem Solving Inventory (PSI)

Heppner and Petersen developed the PSI to determine how individuals perceived their self-sufficiency in solving their own problems and