

A Study on the Problems of Working Children

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Abstract: This study was designed to identify the problems of working children. The study population comprised children attending first through sixth semesters of vocational education centers in Ankara. Data were gathered from a total of 551 children by using the questionnaire developed by the researchers. The findings were computed on SPSS for Windows and frequency distribution tables were drawn. The results revealed that 38.48% of the children had been employed with the help of a relative, 53.5% had only one working child in the family, 39.5% were learning an occupation, 41.6% were working for 9-10 hours daily, 50.1% never worked outside of regular work days, 43.5% received no extra payment for extra work, 73.20% found the air quality at the work place adequate, 90.7% found the lighting adequate, 72.8% found the heating adequate, 69.7% found health conditions adequate, 70.2% found security adequate, 25.4% found the work environment noisy, 18.6% never used a safety equipment and 55.2% were maltreated at the work place. Considering the attitude of the environment towards child labor, it was established that 47.6% of the working children received no objections to their employment, 51.1% gave part of their wages to their family, 43.92% worked at places relevant to their occupation, 59.5% did not receive any medical examination when they were employed, 61.5% did not have an occupational accident, 60.6% always received help from their masters, 61.2% were initially shown how to do their job by their masters, 58.4% had their masters monitor whether they considered health and safety regulations, 61.5% found the occupational information they were given more than adequate and 88.7% believed that the work they did would bring them an occupation in the future.

Key words: Working child • Work conditions • Problems

INTRODUCTION

Millions of children around the world are forced to work due to the poor economic conditions in their countries and their families, the vicious cycle of underdevelopment and poverty and other socio-cultural reasons. They are usually directly or indirectly forced to work without their own will. Having been studied extensively, the issue of child labor is generally associated with child neglect, exploitation and abuse [1-8], while child exploitation, rather than child labor itself, has been expressed as a problem [9].

A “working child” or “child laborer” is defined as anyone under the age of 18 who participates in production in or outside the home and creates surplus value in industry, agriculture or marginal sectors to provide material income, make a living or acquire an occupation [8, 10]. Similar to other countries, child

laborers in Turkey are also made to work from an early age and in negative work conditions and are denied educational, social and health rights [6]. Occupations for children are rather different from adult occupations and children experience more problems at work than adults do [11]. In work environments, children face many factors which threaten their development [12, 13]. Work hours may be too long, wages can be too small and responsibility too much. Occupations that are often monotonous, tedious and repetitive hinder children’s development and limit their freedom [14]. As children have not completed their physical and mental development, they are more deeply influenced by the negative conditions at work [15]. They work unwillingly, under pressure and threats, in conditions which push them physically and psychologically [16]. Physical, mental and emotional losses of children also have an adverse effect on the future of societies, as children

constitute the main human resources of any society [6].

Some working children also attend school at the same time. They work outside of school hours and the combined load of work and school exhausts these children and affects their development negatively [4, 8]. Often overworked and underpaid, these children come to be underachievers and have attendance problems at school. As a result, they become increasingly less advantaged during and after school [17].

To date, many national and international legal regulations have been made in work life. However, these regulations are not yet functional enough, particularly with respect to working children. Thus, many studies have been conducted to analyze children's work environments. Many of these studies examined the reasons, work conditions and problems of working children of various ages and found that they were working due to poverty or to learn an occupation, had negative work conditions and experienced various problems [7, 11, 18-20]. In some previous studies, it was established that children were made to work longer hours than specified in the law [5, 21, 22]. Greenberger [23] showed that working long hours affected school-going adolescents negatively; they spent less time doing homework and enjoyed school less; and as time spent at work increased, so did cigarette and alcohol use.

Even though a decrease was noted in the number of working children in the 2006 Child Laborforce Study by TÜİK due to the launch of 8-year compulsory education [24] and legal regulations were passed, the issue of child labor and related problems still seem to continue. As long as poverty remains a problem, children will stay in the workforce, which makes it worthwhile to study the working conditions and problems of child laborers. With the belief that child labor and its abuse are important research topics, this study aimed to identify working children's problems.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The present study was designed to establish the problems of working children through a descriptive survey. The population of the study was children attending first through sixth semesters of occupational education centers located at the center of Ankara. A total of 652 children were selected through random sampling but the data collection instruments from 101 were excluded due to various reasons. Thus, instruments from a total of 551 children were ultimately used.

Of these 551 children, 84.6% were male and 15.4% were female; 59.7% children were 17 years old, 29.4% were 16 and 10.9% were 15. With respect to the number of children in the family, 37.2% had three children in the family, 33.4% had two, 26.3% had four or more and 3.1% had one child. Of these children, 38.1% were first-born, 37.0% were middle children and 24.9% were last born.

The data collection instrument was a 55-item questionnaire developed by the researchers. It comprised questions about general information about the children and their families, as well as children's work life. The questions in the instrument were written after examining relevant studies in the literature. A report was prepared during the 2008-2009 Fall term, detailing the aims and content of the study, supported with the necessary documents and sent to Ankara Provincial National Education Office to obtain official permission for the study. Before the implementation of the questionnaire, the participants (vocational education center managers, counseling services and class teachers) were contacted to inform them about the aims of the study and the details about the instrument and the process and to identify available times. All questionnaires were implemented in the classrooms by the researchers, mostly accompanied by a school administrator or sometimes with a counselor or one or two teachers. The groups were kept as small as possible. The students were told before the implementation of the questionnaire that the study had an academic nature, their responses would remain confidential and supplying accurate information was important for the elicitation of correct results. No time limitation existed for the completion of the questionnaires. Data obtained were computed on SPSS for Windows and frequency distribution tables were made.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results have shown that 53.5% of the working children had only one working child (himself) in the family, 27.9% had two working children, 12.3% had three and 62% had four or more. At the same time, 51.4% had one school-going child (himself) in the family, 33.4% had two school-going children, 11.8% had three and 3.4% had four or more. In studies by Uysal [18], Köksal [11] and Mangır [19], it was established that working children had other working children at home and both working children and their siblings continued their education. Children who work due to poverty so as to meet their own needs or support their families and their siblings, are known to drop out of school and experience problems such as failure or nonattendance when they attend it.

Of the participants of the present study, 12.34% stated to have found work with their own effort, 38.48% stated to have been referred by a relative, 34.12% by a friend, 7.62% by their family and 3.09% by an acquaintance from their hometown. It can therefore be said that the majority of working children get work through their relatives and friends (72.60%). Köksal reported that [11] 51,25% of the working children in their study found work through a relative and 6.25% through a friend. These findings suggest that there is strong solidarity between relatives in Turkey.

The distribution above shows that 39.5% were working to learn an occupation, 19.9% because they wanted to, 16.3% to meet their personal needs and 16% to support their family (Table 1). Various studies about working children have also shown that children were working to learn an occupation, help their family make a living and meet their own needs [11, 19, 20, 25]. Factors such as identifying a work field for the future are influential in making children learn an occupation. Additionally, children from economically underprivileged families provide an important contribution to family economy with their income.

As shown in the table, 41.6% of the children worked for 9-10 hours, 50.1% never worked outside of regular working days, 8.5% always worked outside of regular working days; and 43.5% never got paid for extra work (Table 2). Therefore, only 12.3% of the children stayed within legal limits of working hours and the majority (87.70%) were overworked. Köksal [11] reported that 31.25% of the working children in their study worked 10 hours daily, 30% worked 9 hours, 22.5% worked 8 hours, 8.75% worked 12 hours or longer, 5% worked 11 hours and 2.5% worked 7 hours daily. These findings also show that the majority of working children (75%) were made to work longer than legal hours. Similarly, Myers [20] reported the presence of children who worked longer than 9 hours daily in Paraguay, Brazil and Peru. There are also other studies which show that children were overworked [7, 25-30]. In Köksal's study [11], 53.75% of working children were found not to work on holidays, 33.75% were found to work on some holidays; 27.5% never got paid for extra work, 46.25% always got paid for extra work, 16.25% often got paid for such work and 10% sometimes did so. Tekin [27] reached the conclusion that 55.6% of working children never got paid for extra work. According to Bulut [13], expecting children to work harder than they are able to halts their development. However, it is known that certain employers make children work longer than legal working hours and pay them no extra wages.

Table 1: Distribution of working children by reason for work

Reason for work	n	%
Helping the family make a living	165	16.0
Meeting personal needs	169	16.3
Meeting school expenses	28	2.7
Learning an occupation	408	39.5
Family demand	35	3.4
Child's own will	206	19.9
Other	23	2.3
Total	1034*	100.0

* As a child could mark more than one answer, the percentages in the table indicate the percentage of marked answers.

Table 2: Distribution of data about time spent working

Daily Duration of Work	n	%
7-8 hours	68	12.3
9-10 hours	229	41.6
11-12 hours	126	22.9
13-18 hours	128	23.2
Total	551	100.0
Having to Work Outside of Regular Working Days	n	%
Always	47	8.5
Often	61	11.1
Sometimes	167	30.3
Never	276	50.1
Total	551	100.0
Receiving Extra Pay for Working Outside of Regular Working Days	n	%
No extra work	78	14.2
Always	102	18.5
Often	44	8.0
Sometimes	87	15.8
Never	239	43.5
Total	550	100.0

Of the participants, 73.20% found the air quality at the work place to be standard, 90.7% found the lighting standard, 72.8% found the heating standard, 69.7% found the health regulations standard, 70.2% found the safety regulations standard and 25.4% found the work place to be noisy (Table 3). In a similar vein, the study by Köksal [11] also found that the majority of working children thought that the air quality, lighting, heating, health and safety regulations at their work place were standard. Even though work conditions for child workers are notoriously substandard, it is evident that they have a low perception of these negative aspects of their work.

Table 3: Children's views about the physical characteristics of the work environment

Air Quality at the Work Place	n	%
Standard	403	73.2
Substandard	90	16.3
No idea	58	10.5
Total	551	100.0
Lighting at the Work Place	n	%
Standard	500	90.7
Substandard	34	6.2
No idea	17	3.1
Total	551	100.0
Heating at the Work Place	n	%
Standard	401	72.8
Substandard	150	27.2
Total	551	100.0
Noise at the Work Place	n	%
Yes	140	25.4
No	411	74.6
Total	551	100.0
Health Regulations	n	%
Standard	384	69.7
Substandard	75	13.6
No idea	92	16.7
Total	551	100.0
Safety Regulations	n	%
Standard	387	70.2
Substandard	79	14.3
No idea	85	15.4
Total	551	100.0

Table 4: Use of equipment and distribution with respect to the equipment used

Use of safety equipment at the work place	n	%
None	169	18.6
Yes	741	81.4
Total	910*	100.0
The equipments used at the work place	n	%
Mask	102	11.2
Gloves	271	29.8
Glasses	80	8.8
Overall	288	31.6
Total	741	81.4

* As a child could mark more than one answer, the percentages in the table indicate the percentage of marked answers.

As can be seen from the table, 31% of the children used overalls and 29.8% used gloves, while 18.6% used no safety equipment (Table 4). Köksal [11] reported that 10.72% of working children did not use any safety

Table 5: Ways of perceiving master's behaviors and maltreatment experienced

Behavior of Master at the Work Place	n	%
Good	428	44.8
Bad	527	55.2
Total	955*	100.0
Maltreatment from Master at the Work Place	n	%
Swearing	36	6.8
Rebuking	79	15.0
Cruelty	25	4.7
Strictness	35	6.6
Battering	10	1.9
Verbal abuse	25	4.7
Disinterest	48	9.1
Perfectionism	146	27.7
Not tolerating mistakes	54	10.2
Unrealistic expectations	69	13.1
Total	527*	100.0

* As a child could mark more than one answer, the percentages in the table indicate the percentage of marked answers.

equipment at all. In a different study, Yılmaz and Bayat [29] found that approximately 40% of the children used glasses or face shields while sanding and welding, 66.7% used masks while painting and approximately 15% or fewer used gloves. Çilingir [15] maintains that working children who come from a social environment where taking risks is considered a symbol of power do not care about using protective equipment at the work place, which may be hazardous.

As presented by the table, 55.2% of working children were maltreated at the work place and perfectionism was the most common maltreatment with 27.7%, followed by rebuking with 15% (Table 5). Köksal [11] reported that the majority of working children (72.5%) were treated well at the work place; however, rebuking, disinterest, swearing and battering also occurred. Boidin [31], on the other hand, found that employers sometimes humiliated children in front of others, hurt their feelings, rejected them, banned them from bonding with their work mates, had unrealistic expectations from them, threatened to make them redundant, shouted at them for mistakes, rebuked and swore at them. Maltreatment based on physical and emotional violence at the work place may leave much deeper marks on children's psycho-social development than the physical hurt it causes. Children's identity development may be seriously damaged as a result [13].

The table shows that 23.4% had low wages and the master got angry when 15.1% was late to work (Table 6). Previous studies have shown that working children

Table 6: Distribution of working children by the problems they face at the work place

Facing problems at the work place	n	%
None	181	21.6
Yes	656	78.4
Total	837*	100.0
Problems at the Work Place		
Fear of being made redundant	59	7.0
Heavy work	98	11.7
Hazardous work	65	7.8
Dirty work	97	11.6
Master getting angry when child is late	126	15.1
Low pay	196	23.4
All of the above	15	1.8
Total	656	78.4

* As a child could mark more than one answer, the percentages in the table indicate the percentage of marked answers.

perceive the problems at the work place as low payment; hard, dirty or hazardous work and fear of being made redundant [11, 25].

The study also reached other results about different problems faced by children at the work place. For instance, it was seen that no one in the environment objected to child labor for 47.6% of the participants, 42.9% were left free to work, 4.9% had someone object to child labor and encourage them to study instead and 2% were forced to work. Kesmen [20], found that 11.25% of children working in the streets were made to work by their families. Even though the number may be small, families forcing their children to work are evidence for a rather difficult social situation.

According to the results of the current study, 42.1% of working children earned 300 TL or less monthly, 27.2% earned between 301-400 TL, 12.9% between 401-500 TL, 7.6% only took tips, 5.4% earned between 501-600 TL, 2.2% between 601-700 TL, 1.5% received no pay, 1.1% earned between 701 TL or more; 51.1% gave a part of their wages to their family, 32.2% gave their entire wages to their family and 13.6% kept it for themselves.ışık [32], Ovalı [33] and Özen [25] concluded in their studies that the majority of working children handed their wages to their families. The present study found that 47.9% of the participants found their income inadequate, 25.2% found it reasonable and 22.2% found it adequate. Köksal [11] and Ovalı [33] also concluded that child laborers found their pay inadequate. It is worth noting that while almost half of the participants reported to find their income inadequate, one third gave part of this small amount to their families.

The results also showed that 43.92% of the participants did work related to their occupation, 20.33% helped the master and foreman with their work, 1.45% did personal jobs of the master and foreman and 29.95% did all of these. Similarly, Köksal [11] also found that the majority of working children did other work in addition to their own at their work places.

The results of the present study revealed that 59.5% of the working children did not undertake a health examination before employment while 27.6% did, 58.6% were not given a health examination other than cases of illness, 61.5% did not have an occupational accident, 17.8% had one and 42.3% presented to a state hospital for cases of illness or accidents. It was also documented by previous research that children did not receive a health examination before employment, were not given regular check-ups and the rate of occupational accidents was rather high [8, 11, 29, 30]. in fact, the law mandates that working children are given regular check-ups [34].

Other results of the present study have shown that 60.6% of the participants were always helped by their masters, 61.2% had their master demonstrate the work initially, 58.4% had their masters monitor their work to see if the processes are in line with safety regulations. According to Köksal's results [11], 53.75% of working children always received help from their masters when learning the job, 61.25% had their master demonstrate the work initially and 48.75% had their masters monitor their work to see if the processes are in line with safety regulations. Despite the high rate of children who are monitored by their masters, there is also a group that is never monitored, while in fact all children need to be watched for health and safety.

Finally, this study has found that 61.5% of the participants thought the vocational information they received was adequate and 88.7% believed that their work would give them an occupation in the future. Likewise, Köksal [11] concluded that 67.5% of his participants found the occupational information given to them more than adequate and 88.75% believed that the work they were doing would give them an occupation in the end. Ceylan and Metin [35] found that 88.6% of working children received occupational training from their masters and Özen [25] concluded that 87.6% of the children they studied believed that the work they were doing would bring them a good future. Other previous studies also reported that learning an occupation was one of the top reasons for working [19, 25, 35, 36], leading to the conclusion that it is an expected finding for children to believe that working would provide them with an occupation in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Children usually work in improper conditions, for long hours, without protection, with less than ideal work relations and for very little pay, as a result of which their development is hampered, they are left behind at school and they fail to also receive a satisfying occupational education. Therefore, it is important to take these children's problems seriously and develop short and long-term measures. In the short term, the work environments of working children may be checked to see whether they are appropriate for the physical and psychological health of children; whether employers are observing working times, resting times, holidays, paid and unpaid leaves, religious holidays, payment system, health and safety regulations and social security services; whether there is a healthy communication between the employer and children about the work and the processes; and whether existing legal regulations are followed. Working children, families, employees and other segments of the society need to be informed about the developmental features of children, their rights and child abuse. In the long term, child labor may be banned altogether for the social and economic wellbeing of the country. The elimination of problems in the short and long run can only be possible with the effective implementation of legal regulations and the active participation of all parties-the state, non-governmental organizations, professional societies, voluntary societies, universities, the press, television channels and unions.

New studies and projects may be planned to identify the problems of children working in various sectors and regional solutions may be reached by examining local characteristics and problems. Also, research studies may be designed to examine the effects of work life on children's development. In addition, studies may be conducted to reveal the influence of work life on children's assessment of their families and their relationships with families and friends.

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