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CHILD WASTE PICKERS IN A SOUTH-EASTERN CITY IN TURKEY

Türkiye'nin Güneydoğusunda Bir Şehirde Atık Madde Toplayan Çocuklar

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ÖZET

Çocuk işçiliği Türkiye'de çocukların maruz kaldığı ana sorunlardan biridir ve atık madde toplayıcılığı çocuk işçiliğinin yakın zamanlarda ortaya çıkmış ve en kötü formlarından biridir. Atık madde toplayıcılığı Türkiye'nin büyük şehirlerinin sokaklarında çok yaygın biçimde rastlanan bir çalışma biçimidir ve özellikle Diyarbakır'da çocukların bu işi icra ettiği görülmektedir. Bu niteliksel araştırmada 30 çocukla derinlemesine mülakatlar yapılmıştır. Sonuç olarak, çocukların düşünce ve deneyimleri bu çalışmaya şu temalar çerçevesinde olabildiğince dâhil edilmiştir: sosyo-demografik özellikler, çalışma nedenleri, okulla ilişkiler, aile ve akrabalarla ilişkiler ve diğer insanlarla ilişkiler.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Çocuk, çocuk hakları, sokakta çalışan çocuklar, atık madde toplayan çocuklar, Diyarbakır*

ABSTRACT

Child labour is one of the many major problems among children in Turkey, and waste picking is one of the most recent and worst forms of child labour. It is a widespread form of working on the streets in Turkey's big cities, and is performed in particular by children in Diyarbakır,

where 30 children were interviewed in detail during this qualitative research. Consequently, the opinions and experiences of children were to the greatest possible extent included in the study, from the perspective of the following themes: socio-demographic characteristics, causes of work, relations with the school, relations with family and relatives, and relations with other people.

Key words: Child, children's rights, street working children, child waste pickers, Diyarbakır

INTRODUCTION

I know the streets, as they know me (Kasım, 14).

The streets, to some of us, are the paths that we use to reach somewhere... Some of us are happy to be on the streets while others are eager to leave them as soon as they find a shelter to go inside. For children, the streets mean fun and games, but only for those who are "lucky". For others, these are the places where they have to live amid housing dangers and labour.

The streets are unsafe and risky environments for waste picker children, where physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse may take place. The streets, which under normal conditions should be used by children for playing games and playing their part in life, become an environment with various potential risks where childhood cannot be experienced. Although, for waste picker children, the street at first glance seems to be an environment they would love and be happy with, it takes so much away from them and their childhood and they are not even aware of this...

Philippe Aries (1962) asserts that childhood is a modern construction, a new discovery, and that children, for many long and pre-modern centuries, used to be far removed from our perception of them in today's world as "little gentlemen" and "little ladies". However, "modern" times did not only invent childhood as a category different to adulthood packed with adorable and young human beings, but they also have their "chimney sweepers". This study acts as the voice of the chimney sweepers of modern times, the waste picker children of Diyarbakır. It is also the first one ever to be carried out in Turkey that lends an ear to this voice.

The presence of children seeking their survival on city streets is not a new phenomenon around the world. Precursors of today's street children can be found throughout history and across societies in different forms, as evident in the labels that have been used for unaccompanied children seeking a living on city streets:

waifs, gamins, urchins, street Arabs and guttersnipes (Raffaelli & Koller, 2016). And a century ago the term for street children in Turkey was “underbridge children”.

The problem of street children is a universal one. Despite some cultural differences there are commonalities among all street children. Family problems come first among them. There is no well-established family comprehension of street children. To sum up some of the realities of street children, there are some common characteristics of street children around the world. For instance, they are used in illegal substance and money issues; they are forced to commit theft; there are no life opportunities for girls on the streets without prostitution; they are generally addicted to narcotic drugs; and they are at high risk of contracting AIDS, etc. The use of intoxicants such as glue or benzene is highlighted in Aptekar’s studies (1994, 2014). Other common characteristics include: parental refusal, school failure, being pushed into crime, joining gangs and physical difficulties (Agnelli, 1986). The reasons for children being on the street can be classified as: migration, economic problems, family relations, education, and emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse (Pehlivanlı, 2008).

The term “street child” is used to describe children who live and/or work on the streets, especially in urban spaces. Loose distinctions can be made between the following three categories (Ennew, 2000):

Street working children – children who work on the street, usually sleep at home and keep in contact with their family.

Street living children – children who usually sleep on the street and have limited or no contact with their family. These children are generally on the street as a result of family breakdown and violence linked to extreme poverty.

Children at risk – children who are in penitentiaries or institutions, and the younger siblings of street working children.

The phenomenon, according to UNICEF, is divided into children “on” the streets and children “of” the streets. Children “on” the streets are those who have a home to live in, but they work full- or part-time. Children “of” the streets are those “whose home ties have been seriously weakened and who essentially live on the street” (UNICEF, 1993).

Despite the fact that increasing numbers of children working or living on the streets of urban areas have been a major concern of social policy, there are still thousands

of them on the streets usually picking up waste, paper and garbage. Those picking up waste on the streets are the most visible ones among children who are in need of special protection in Turkey.

Because of the many problems they encountered at early ages, street children are bound to remain disadvantaged throughout their lifetime due to a lack of life experience in an organized family. They also lack basic education and vocational training opportunities. Girls in particular are also exposed to sexual exploitation, rape and prostitution (Beyene & Berhane, 2017). The main problems of these children are:

- Limited access to safe places,
- Lack of counselling services,
- Lack of parental support,
- Dropping out or being at risk of dropping out of school,
- Lack of health insurance, and
- Danger of sexual abuse or addiction to solvents.

The problem of street children in Turkey is mainly due to structural problems in the country, which can be listed as rural-urban migration, rapid urbanization, an uncontrolled population increase and unequal distribution of income. The existence of street children under different names and with various attempts to address their situation goes back to the 1920s in Turkey. Orphans on the streets of İstanbul in the post-World War era attracted the attention of officials and immediate intervention was provided. Although groups of homeless children appeared in the 1950s once again, with heavy rural-urban migration, it was not until the 1990s that the problem became visible and widespread, and hence attracted the attention of the public and the media. Large numbers migrated to the major cities such as İstanbul, İzmir, Ankara, Mersin, Adana, Antalya, Diyarbakır and Gaziantep due to political unrest and resulting armed conflict in South-East Turkey. Children of those families that migrated to the cities totally unprepared found themselves working on the street to contribute to the family income under unprotected and abusive conditions. In the 1990s the number of street children increased annually and the number of related problems grew considerably over time (Atauz & Arts, 2004).

The emergence of working street children in Turkey as a form of child labour can be traced back to the 1980s (Dikici Bilgin, 2006). In Turkey, the majority of working street children work on the street but somehow spend the night at home and are in touch with their families (Akşit et al., 2001). Their ongoing contact with their families is supposed to provide, at least to some extent, family protection (Atauz, 1989). Sevim and Üçer (2012), based on their qualitative research on Roman families in Elazığ, a city in the east of Turkey, emphasized the negative value of children in their families. According to their research, children's working on the streets is accepted as "natural".

The second group, composed of those who also spend the night on the street, is mostly involved in garbage collection and separation; many of them tend to engage in illicit activities such as drug abuse, street gangs and prostitution (Dikici Bilgin, 2006).

Waste picker children constitute a significant proportion of street children in Turkey. The process first began with the realization that recyclables have a certain economic value. With the rapid improvements in technology and the aim of creating a sustainable environment, recyclables have become products of economic value. As a consequence of the environmental awareness that developed, waste recycling became important and the waste picking industry emerged as an informal area (Acar & Baykara Acar, 2008: 1).

Adults are also widely involved in the process while children are also unfortunately actors in the process. Waste picking, which has recently become widespread but has not yet been examined as a form of street work, has become one of the categories of street industry in Turkey with the most widespread involvement of child labour.

Thousands of children work as waste pickers. They collect plastic, tins, bottles, pieces of metal, discarded containers and other things. Waste pickers are exposed to ulcers, scabies and other skin diseases. These children also usually pick food from waste. According to Barki and Manhas (2012), most children begin working as waste pickers at the tender age of five or six. The majority of them never attend school and do not have any formal education. Their families are generally in need of extra incomes from their children. When they collect rags they are subjected to chemical poisons and infection.

Meanwhile, these children are regarded as elements that spoil urban aesthetics and are seen most of the time in a negative light (Saltan & Yardımcı, 2007). Society regards them as antisocial elements, an embarrassment to the community and unfit to live (Barki & Manhas, 2012).

This problem, of course, is not peculiar to Turkey and similar practices are also seen in many other third world countries. For example, in India, approximately 10,000 waste pickers in the city recover materials from rubbish thrown into the streets (Medina, 1997).

The aim of this research is to understand the labouring process of waste picker children from their own perspective. In addition, answers were sought to the following questions:

- What is the socio-economic and cultural background of child waste pickers?
- How do the reasons for child waste pickers being on the street vary?
- What dangers are encountered in the street by childwaste pickers?
- What are the opinions of child waste pickers of the way they are regarded by society?
- What are the suggestions of child waste pickers for ridding themselves of working life?
- What are the future expectations of child waste pickers?

Background

From the 1950s and through to the “industrial revolution” of the 1970s, Turkey’s social structure underwent a transformation. The traditional structures of an empire relying on agriculture dissolved; traditional institutions, values, relationships and many other things began to change (BAAK, 1991). In this period, the effort put into industrialization, mechanization of agriculture, education, health, transportation services and mass media increased rapidly. The population began to increase and moved to city centres. New job opportunities emerged in cities (Merter, 1990).

For most people, industrialization threatened the family by taking it apart from the traditional community settlement and demolishing its members via the cruelty of industrial manufacturing and automization in big cities (Bullock & Trombley, 1999). According to Kongar (1972), most research shows that the family, which was

functional in the agricultural community, lost its functioning through industrialization and urbanization.

From the 1950s, the massive population shift from villages to cities prepared a base for new social, economic and demographic changes. This was not only caused by the situation just after World War II, but also conditions in rural areas deteriorated because of a lack of investment, and the ruling elite sought to improve the cities as models of progress (Karpaz, 1976: 56 cited in Pehlivanlı, 2008).

For almost 40 years, people continued to settle down in urban centres, and in 1985, the urban population reached 51% percent of the total population. These migrations were mostly because of social and economic deficiencies and the internal conflict in south-eastern Turkey. Hence, many families migrated to big cities like İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Adana, Antalya, Diyarbakır and Gaziantep without any preparation (Pehlivanlı, 2008). It can be said that relatively poor regions of Turkey, namely eastern and south-eastern parts, witnessed the migration of a large population to bigger cities. Migrants wanted to find better life opportunities, more opportunity to work and more money. Since city centres did not have enough resources to provide the needed accommodation, education, health services and job opportunities, this period of migration brought a lot of trouble. In addition, this new situation had a direct effect on income distribution and on housing (Atauz, 1989).

In Turkey, there are about 25 million children. This corresponds to nearly 34% of the total population. Although children comprise such a significant proportion of the population, Turkey is not a “paradise” for them. One of the problems is child labour. The most recent data regarding child labour are based on the “Household Child Labour Survey” conducted by the Turkish Statistical Institution in the year 2012. According to the results of this survey, in 2012, some 292,000 children were working in an age group in which children legally cannot work.

The problem of child waste pickers is a new one for Turkey. With the realization of the economic value of waste materials, this industry was born, and children, who were regarded as cheap labour, readily became involved in this new industry.

In many cities in Turkey, and especially in the bigger cities, it is possible to come across waste picker children, and the number of children picking up waste materials in Diyarbakır is quite high.

Diyarbakır is a city in the south-eastern part of Turkey (see Figure 1). The total population of this city, according to the census conducted by the Turkish Statistical

Institution in 2011, is 1,570,943. In addition, 53% of the population of Diyarbakır consists of children. This means that the number of children in Diyarbakır is significantly higher when compared to the child population figures in Turkey.

Intensive migration took, and still takes place to Diyarbakır, from the surrounding cities. Moreover, there is serious poverty and unemployment in the city. Many social problems due to a combination of migration, poverty and unemployment are observed in Diyarbakır. Waste picking and the inclusion of children in this industry is a social problem that requires attention.

Throughout the 1990s, there was forced migration from Diyarbakır to the bigger cities in western Turkey and also from the surrounding rural areas to Diyarbakır. This was at the height of the Kurdish problem. Due to the armed conflict in the south-eastern part of the country, thousands of people died, many villages in the region were evacuated and the population in these areas was subject to forced migration. Some of this migration was to big cities such as Istanbul and Izmir, and also towards the nearer urban centres like that of Diyarbakır. Having been forced to migrate to the city centres, people found no integration policies or facilities. They were going to be faced with a cruel poverty constituting a kind of underclass. Most of the children participating in this research have experienced this.

METHOD

A qualitative method of research was employed. The data were collected through in-depth interviews with child waste pickers in Diyarbakır, where waste picking work is carried out on a huge scale. In this framework, 30 children were interviewed. The children were asked before the interview whether they wanted to take part, and the interviews were performed only with those who agreed. Nevertheless, two children did not want to continue during the interview, and it was terminated. The children were assured that their names were not going to be made public in the report.

Interviews were carried out between 8th July and 1st August 2013. The interviews were conducted by two research assistants who knew the area very well and could speak Kurdish because all the interviewees were Kurdish, and the interviews took 30 minutes on average. The interviews were conducted on the streets as the children continued collecting waste materials. The two research assistants spent some time on the street and it took a while to earn their trust in order to obtain reliable information. Because the research was conducted in 2013 the findings should be interpreted within this context and/or limit.

The interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Nicknames were chosen for the interviewees as follows: Kasım, Cevdet, Çiya, Ahmet, Bülent, Selami, Oktay, Zeki, Nuri, Hasan, Ferdi, Ali, Hüseyin, Murat, Süleyman, Recep, Gökhan, Tufan, Serdar, Ramazan and Nusret. All the interviewees were male.

The records were categorized thematically after being read many times. Within the framework of these themes, their data were subjected to descriptive analysis. A word processor was used in carrying out these phases.

FINDINGS

The interviews with the 30 child waste pickers interviewed in this section are discussed in accordance with the common themes previously determined.

Socio-demographic characteristics

The child waste pickers in Diyarbakır are from families with many children. The number of siblings in the families of the interviewed children ranges from 6 to 11. There are similarities between the causes driving the families to the city centre of Diyarbakır and their current living conditions. The families of these children were obliged to migrate to the city centre from outlying districts because throughout the 1990s thousands of peripheral villages were evacuated by the state. It can be asserted that not only in Diyarbakır but also in the South-eastern and Eastern Anatolia regions of Turkey, the causes underlying the problem of children working and living on the streets are the underdevelopment problems in these regions. Forced migration is the main cause of the problem.

Our houses were evacuated in the village in Lice (county of Diyarbakır).

That's why we came to Diyarbakır (Çiya, aged 13).

Children are well aware of the real causes that drove them onto the streets. Children are aware of the life of desperation they are living, and now they are full of sorrow and have a longing for the past, albeit imaginary.

I don't want to do this job; I am not doing well with my life. We would be in our village if only it was not burnt down. We could work in our fields then (Ahmet, aged 14).

Those pastoral and romantic years in the village are unfortunately over. The places that became the destination of the forced migration where new lives were started up

are the poor districts in the peripheral areas of the city. This poverty is also what drives the children away from school to the streets and even to crime.

We are paying rent for the house. They sell drugs in our neighbourhood.

There are thieves too (Selami, aged 13).

The house I live in is just like those barns in the village (Oktay, aged 18).

As to their approach to and relations with crime, some of the children take a clear stand against theft while some of them think it is valid and defend it.

These garbage dealers are all thieves. Theft is something good (Murat, aged 13).

Many of the waste pickers steal. I do not do such things. I do not bring back unearned goods. They steal buckets or dustbins (Ahmet, aged 14).

I earned 50 TL yesterday; I stole materials from gas pipers (Murat, aged 13).

Along with the well-known socio-economic conditions driving children into theft, another significant factor is the fact that they work during the night.

I used to work until the morning. If I work all night long, I will steal. All of those that work in the night are stealing; what will they do, will they get enough with a couple of plastic bottles? (Ferdî, aged 16).

The children are living under such negative conditions that their affiliation with crime does not only consist of theft. There are many factors encouraging them to commit crime.

The place we live is dangerous. They are into drug dealing business. One of them was selling heroin. He asked me to work with him but I refused. He said, you will tell me if an officer (police) comes but I did not agree to that (Ahmet, aged 14).

Theft becomes a usual and in some ways a valid act, and along with the factors encouraging other crimes, children may sometimes commit very serious crimes.

They communicated with a girl on Facebook. The girl learned about the poverty of my friend and he tried to take the girl away to rape her. But we did not let him do that (Hüseyin, aged 14).

Socio-demographic characteristics of the children reveal that their presence in the streets in fact stems from the migration from rural areas to the city centre, that they live in poverty, and that their vulnerable position is doubled due to not only poverty but also the conditions in the neighbourhood.

Causes of work

The working hours of the children picking up rags may vary. The hours with the highest gain are the most dangerous hours.

When you wake up at 4 a.m., you earn something in this job. You find nothing during the daytime (Murat, aged 13).

Not only are the hours of work in the street variable, but so too are the weather conditions. There is not much work in cold weather. And in the summer, children work until the morning.

The amount earned by the children from waste picking varies according to the time they spend on the street, but on average it is around 15 to 30 Turkish Lira (TL) (about 10 to 15 dollars).

The first issue encountered by the children when they first get into waste picking is being in debt. The waste collection organizers, who are known as “junk dealers”, give credit to children. The debts are reduced when children bring back waste materials. Therefore, the children become dependent on the waste material industry and factories.

They give 400 to 500 TL to many of the children. The children cannot even bring back 10 TL or 15 TL per day. Why on earth would you give 500 lira to a child? They first make the younger children in debt and then they send them out to work (Ali, aged 18).

For example, you buy yourself shoes; you get credit from them (the junk collectors). And when you try to leave the job, the junk collector does not leave you alone. They tell you to pay back all the debt (Çiya, aged 13).

Children sell the waste materials they have collected to people called “junk collectors”. Children talk about the prices per material and the money earned by the junk collectors as follows:

...We sell to the junk collectors. For example, a kilogram of plastic is 60 qurush, nylon is 50 qurush, iron is 40 qurush, aluminium is 2 lira, cardboard is 1.5 lira, and copper is 10 lira (Serdar, aged 13).

The price of cardboards 125 qurush per kilo. That is sold to the factory for 160 to 170 qurush. While I earn 100 to 200 lira here, they will earn 500 to 600 lira (Gökhan, aged 18).

It is easier to collect some products than others, and that is the greatest determinant of the money earned.

I quarrel with the other waste pickers. They say give me plastic, I haven't got anything yet for today. It is very hard to pick up plastic bags for me. When I leave my cart, they steal the bag (Recep, aged 15).

The poverty and deprivation of children and their families have become so deep and left these people in so much desperation that the primary reason behind the children's working in the street has been their obligation to "make a living for the household".

There is no one working at home and therefore I have to go out for work. If only my father could work, I would not do this job. We are 9 people at home and what else can I do? (Zeki, aged 16).

Their fathers are generally unable to work because of sickness or disability and the eldest child of the house takes up the immense responsibility of making his siblings go to school and earn a living for the household. And sometimes, when the father is in prison, the child is driven to the streets. Whatever the reason is that drives the child onto the street is in fact the reason that drives the father to prison.

My father is in prison. I do not know why he is there. He did not notice and they left drugs in the car and the blame was on him. My mother is sick in hospital and I am living with my aunt until my mother gets out (Nuri, aged 11).

I work for money. We have no money to spend on our needs (Hasan, aged 14).

It is accepted and natural that children have to work on the street and bring money back to the house. They may even face violence when they do not.

They get angry when I do not bring money home. We get a beating for that (Ferdî, aged 16).

A child who cannot take money to the house feels guilty because of the deprivation they are in. That is why wandering around for fun and other “childish” activities are perceived as shameful and unnecessary.

Suddenly the electricity bill comes and this disturbs me. Instead of taking money home, should I wander around aimlessly? You feel good inside when you take money home. My father gets depressed when the electricity bills and the rent are due as he cannot do anything about it (Ali, aged 18).

Children start spending time on the streets and picking up rags with the mediation of either a friend or a member of the family.

I met a friend, he used to go picking rags and therefore I started it (Hüseyin, aged 14).

I was first told by my paternal cousin. I went to help them and went out to work and therefore got used to it (Murat, aged 13).

I had a friend and he went to pick rags from the animal market and I started going out with him and I got used to it (Zeki, aged 16).

Once they are out on the street, the children develop an attachment to the streets that is hard to describe. The streets are the home of a certain kind of freedom and childish games.

I do this job and I like doing it. It is nice. We take walks with friends (Hasan, aged 14).

I would like to be doing this job in 10 years time. This job is good for me (Murat, aged 13).

When you get used to this job, you don't want to leave it, I went to the village and got bored in a week. I shall go and work. There are no friends in the village, nor any electricity. I have friends here doing the same job (Murat, aged 13).

As a result, it seems almost impossible to end up with a structural economic analysis, which is, of course, beyond the scope of this study. Instead, this study's original contribution is to examine the perspectives of these children as actors. And

it is pretty obvious that child waste pickers become attached to the street for several diverse and interesting reasons.

Relations with the school

One of the main reasons that children are encouraged to work on the street is that they are out of the school system. Almost all of the children interviewed had to drop out of school and work.

I do not go to school. It's been a year since I dropped out as my elder brother went for military service. I send money to my brother (Süleyman, aged 14).

I dropped out in the 6th year. It was last year. I have been picking rags for 4 to 5 months, and before that, I used to go to school. I do not want to go to school (Hasan, aged 14).

The most significant reason why these children drop out of school is the lack of social services at school and the inadequacy of counselling services. Leaving aside the lack of social work interventions for schoolchildren's problems, there is no school system that gives an ear to the problems of these children. And in some cases, the school itself becomes a source of neglect and abuse and children may from time to time be exposed to emotional and physical abuse by their teachers.

Why did I leave school? The principal said to me "you are a waste picker and you smoke". In front of all those people... And that's why he beat me too (Oktay, aged 18).

Whatever bad happens, happens to the poor. They make the poor fail at school. There is no guidance or anything. Go to school and you will see how it is. There is thievery. That's not what a school should be. The school is no good. The school is degenerated. If you want to go to school, you need to go to school in Istanbul. The teachers here are no good. Teachers here are illiterate and they come here to teach us. We were the ones to teach the teacher, it was not the teacher who taught us (Cevdet, aged 18).

The child has to justify his being on the street while his friends are at school. He will, of course, talk about the virtues of working.

I don't like school. The school is void. What will happen when I graduate from high school anyway? All of those who did so are unemployed. They fight in classes. When do you finish school? When you are 24... Instead of studying that long, you better work (Recep, aged 15).

The channels to enable the children that are left out of the school system return to school are unfortunately closed. The child who leaves the school once is abandoned desperately on the streets. There is no attractive environment for children who return with the personal efforts of some teachers.

I left school in the 5th grade. They gave me clothes from school and told me to go back. They put me among the 6th graders and they were younger than me and I was ashamed to go to school. I told them to put me in upper grades, which they did not. I will go back if they put me in higher-grade classes since little children are teasing me there. I do not have any friends (Zeki, aged 16).

Obviously, children have many negative stories to tell as reasons why they are out of school. But the real reason is beyond this, and is the result of the socio-economic poverty of these children. Although children express their hatred towards school, at the same time they miss it.

They give me homework to do but I go to pick rags in the evening. How can I do it, which one should I do first? I wanted to go to bed after coming from picking rags and could not do my homework. Being at school is always good, it saves one's future. I would like to go back to school. I would do that if they gave sustenance for my family. I was a good student and received a certificate of merit three or four times (Ferdî, aged 16).

Those with some attachment to school "for the time being" comfortably express their hopes and expectations about school life:

I am a 7th grade student. If I had not failed a year, I would be going into the 8th grade now. I like school, I have good marks, and I get on well with my teachers. I think about continuing with school. I will go to high school, to the high school of science (Ahmet, aged 14).

To sum up, children's being in the streets originates not only from the extreme poverty they experience, but also from the inability of the school system to assess,

intervene, evaluate and monitor them bridging the gap between education and social policy.

Relations with family and relatives

The relations of the children with their families are generally very bad. In Turkey, solidarity among relatives is culturally very important, and therefore the expectations of the families from their relatives are more of interest, and of material and spiritual support. However, in the new world of living in poverty and deprivation, neither the affinity nor the solidarity of the old days is continuing.

I do not have good relations with my relatives. Relatives should care for each other. We do not have such relatives. Nobody helps us. My uncle is not an uncle to me. When he brings a pack of flour, that's when I call him my uncle. Thanks to God we are not in need of help from anybody (Gökhan, aged 18).

It is not good at all. Why would a person not want the good of another person? They should drop dead. May God curse them (Ali, aged 18).

For the father of the house, the children should bring the money home and nothing else is important. The father is irrelevant to the conditions in which the child is working. And children are also not aware of what their fathers do.

I do not know whether my father works or not. In fact, I do not know what business he is into, he does not tell us. My father knows that I am working in this job, he does not object to it. When I take the money home, it is OK. He is also indifferent when I do not do so (Recep, aged 15).

There are serious communication problems within families. The abuse is not only economic, but also physical and spiritual within the family too.

I escaped from home as my father used to beat me. One morning, my father found me and took me back home. He said he would not interfere any more (Ahmet, aged 14).

Waste picking is perceived negatively both by the society and the family. Aside from this, children working and taking money home is so usual and widespread that what the father recommends to the child is another "more reasonable" job.

My mother says, don't go, it is dirty. Once, our neighbour and my uncle saw me. The neighbour told my mother and she told my father. My father said, don't go for this job. Go and get a cart. And the relatives of my mother say you should go and then you will earn 15 to 20 lira every day (Ahmet, aged 14).

These findings prove that solving the problem of street working children requires a holistic and systemic approach which brings different systems together such as family, school, and welfare. However, these children seem to be fruits of malfunctioning of each system.

Relations with other people

The primary feelings determining the relations of these children with others are shame and abasement. The children are ashamed because of the nature of their work as well as the insulting approach of others. For this reason, they generally keep this work secret.

A few of my friends from school know that I am working. They humiliate me. They tease me (Hüseyin, aged 14).

I am ashamed when people are around. They insult me. And I swear back at them. When they start teasing, I attack them (Hüseyin, aged 14).

Sometimes, they can have aggressive attitudes towards those who insult them. The conversion of shame into aggression can also be an expression of class rage. This class rage is strengthened by the insulting grins of their peers who are at ease.

People do not look at me in prosperous districts, their children look and grin and call us sweepers (Zeki, aged 16).

The fire of rebellion within children is not likely to go out since the conditions they live in seem to be permanent and their rebellion has given rise to such rhetorical validity of these conditions that they cling on to this rage.

The world is good for the rich (Zeki, aged 16).

I would make my children work too; life was hard for me when I was young and you should work too (chuckles), they should see the tough side as a child so that they would work better when they grow up. I would not let them pick rags but I would make them work in other jobs.

This would teach them a lesson on how evil the ways of the world are. It is good for the rich and bad for the poor (Zeki, aged 16).

This outrage towards the prosperous and prosperity brings about praise for poverty and a valid argument like that of Robin Hood.

We took off the doors of all of Bayramoğlu's (the district) buildings (laughs). They fired guns at me, brother. The police... caught us. We made an appearance at court... Why would I feel remorseful? I do not take off the doors of the poor! I do this to the rich people. The poor people are us. But I get irritated by all the rich people (Tufan, aged 16).

The rich go and gamble and lose their money gambling but the poor people gain with their compassion (Gökhan, aged 18).

The cultural connotations of the words "rubbish man" are very negative. As an example of the discriminative and dismissive examples within the culture, the words "garbage man" result in the expression of a feeling of dismissal internalized by these children because of their work. As a symbolic expression, "garbage man" reveals everything that actually happens by removing the cover.

The word I most dislike is garbage. And if someone comes and calls me garbage, I cannot accept that. My conscience does not even though I can. For instance, those ladies. Actually I do not like ladies. We are all human but I just don't... They call me a garbage man (Gökhan, aged 18).

For example, they call me garbage, they swear at me. I find it hard. They should not say it (Serdar, aged 13).

The general social perception of the child waste pickers is that these children are thieves. The relation between crime and children in the mind of ordinary people has not been questioned yet. They label these children "thinner addicts", "thieves" etc. This can drive a child who is not yet a criminal into becoming one and can make crime accessible.

I am ashamed that people regard me as a thief... Some people in the street treat us badly, they swear at us, and call us thieves. One feels urged to fight against them (Ahmet, aged 14).

Even if we do not steal anything, they think that we did it. People should not treat us badly just because we are dealing with garbage. They beat us when we spread garbage around. The salesmen become angry with us and want us to clear the road. And I say to them, if only you were dealing with this garbage like me (Selami, aged 13).

The streets are not only the home of the homeless but they also resemble a jungle with all its dangers. The child waste pickers are in danger of getting wounded, killed or molested, and have their things seized as well as many other risks. Those in the streets have various backgrounds: “thinner addicts”, thieves, usurpers, thugs, waste pickers etc. The waste pickers do not have any choice but to hang on to each other in the middle of such a jungle full of dangers.

The thinner addicts are also committing sexual abuse. My friend helps me and we protect each other (Hüseyin, aged 14).

One of them recently drove his bike towards me, he was looking for trouble. I slapped him twice. He took out his knife. I snatched his knife from him and we fought (Ali, aged 18).

There are those who attack without a reason. For example, they steal our stuff, we catch them, either we will kill them or beat them up (Süleyman, aged 14).

The most obvious targets at whom the outrage of the child waste pickers is directed are the public servants, on the other hand. It is also clear that these public officers routinely treat these children in an inhumane way.

The garbage men of the municipality get angry; they say we scatter the garbage around on purpose (Ahmet, aged 14).

The most problematic relationship is with the police. They are subject to constant violence from the police.

The police take us to the station. They ask us whether we steal or not. They beat us over and over again and then leave us (Çiya, aged 13).

The police are bribe takers. When you steal and get caught by them, when you bribe them they play the three blind monkeys. Then they let us go (Ferdî, aged 16).

It is obvious that these children encounter social workers too. However, it is understood that the social work intervention in their favour is insufficient. All the social workers can do is give out social aid. However, intervention strategies should be created to deal with the source of the problem.

We go to the youth centre and have some food sometimes. They give us clothes and give us books when we are at school. They say do not go waste picking. But if we don't, the household will be hungry and we have no choice (Ferdî, aged 16).

So, it seems pretty obvious that street working children suffer not only from the extreme poverty, but also all types and degrees of social exclusion and stigmatization. They are also physically attacked and abused in the streets.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on the lives of waste picker children in Diyarbakır referring to socio-demographic characteristics, causes of work, relations with the school, relations with family and relatives, and relations with other people.

According to the main findings of the study, the waste picker children's presence may be argued as a result of the migration from rural areas to the city centre, of their life in poverty, and of their vulnerable position due to not only poverty but also the conditions in the neighbourhood. So, it is pretty obvious that child waste pickers become attached to the street for several diverse and interesting reasons.

Children's being in the streets originates not only from the extreme poverty they experience, but also from the inability of the school system to assess, intervene, evaluate and monitor them bridging the gap between education and social policy. So, an urgent call for social policy should be a call for school social work in Turkey because solving the problem of street working children requires a holistic and systemic approach which brings different systems together such as family, school, and welfare.

It seems pretty obvious that the waste pickers suffer not only from the extreme poverty, but also all types and degrees of social exclusion and stigmatization. They are also physically attacked and abused in the streets.

Despite all that has happened, these children carry hope as they look towards the future. Some of them want to be plumbers, some want to be repairmen and some would like to be doctors. Meanwhile, these children are acting with an extraordinary self-devotion and altruism. Süleyman, aged 14, says: "I would sacrifice myself for

my mother to live.” These are little men with so much devotion that they leave school to start working so their brothers can get an education and in order to bring money home because their fathers are sick.

Nevertheless, these little men must behave like children, remember their childhood and get rid of the heavy burden on their shoulders. When asked “What is the meaning of childhood?”, 10-year-old Bülent replies: “It is playing games and painting.” The children who play games and who paint are either on television or in their imagination. When Bülent reaches the age of 18, he will probably say, as Gökhan does now: “Garbage is my bread.” The burden on his shoulders will constantly grow and he will say to everyone: “You drink beer for pleasure and I drink it because of sorrow” (Cevdet, aged 18).

The answers from the children as to how their problems can be solved are surprising. They give responses in which they regard working as an inevitable fate, as a kind of slavery. They give answers to these questions in anticipation of social aid from the state or another “reasonable” job...

I think they must shut this old city down. The municipality should give jobs to these children (Ali, aged 18).

Why would people go to pick garbage if the state gave us a salary every month? We would leave this job if they gave us another job (Ferdi, aged 16).

Among these children is Süleyman, who says: “We need a profession, sir. And a house of our own.” And there is also Kasım, who says: “Nothing, I do this for my own pleasure. I love crap and garbage.” The second quote sounds more childish. Instead of little men who grow up most quickly if they are the youngest, the second sounds more like childhood, despite the helplessness of it all...

The suggestions of many of the children are more focused on professional courses. Child labour is a fate, and therefore, when they have an option to be a professional in a more “reasonable” job, for them, this will have the function of moving up in the world.

Only if a vocational education course was opened and we learned a profession there... For instance, welding, iron processing, furniture making etc. It would be good if we could learn any kind of profession (Ramazan, aged 14).

A good profession. Where I would not have to take orders from anyone. It should be a clean place. We should not be into garbage (Oktay, aged 18).

There are clues amidst the expressions of the children about the points where the social aid and social service approach of the state fails. For example, the educational aids provided by the state fall short.

If the state gave me a nice job, I would love to work. I'm doing this job because the state says children should not work. The state gives a maximum 200 lira for education once every two or three months (Nusret, aged 13).

The disabled brother of Zeki cannot get aid from the state. If he could, Zeki says he would dispense with working on the street.

I do this job because I have to. For example, I have a disabled brother; he cannot get his regular payment; I would not do this if he could (Zeki, aged 16).

And some long for environments and opportunities where and with which they can spend their time efficiently.

If there were such activities as sports, football, etc., I would not go out for garbage (Selami, aged 13).

The case of waste picker children in Diyarbakır has great meaning in terms of social work practice in Turkey. What social work should be interested in most in Turkey as a developing country is poverty, but it is an unfortunate phenomenon that the profession is concentrated mostly on micro-level work. On the other hand, it does not try to understand the political and sociological roots of social problems in Turkey, and focuses only on the results. Social work intervention, which is established in an apolitical context, cannot contribute to the solution of social problems. It is so difficult to talk about an institutionalized social work intervention in the case of waste picker children, and despite the fact that all children explain the problem with reference to "burnt houses" and "forced migration", social workers are inclined towards seeing it as broken off from its context.

There have been important success stories in the western metropolises of Turkey such as İstanbul and Ankara, especially in the 1990s, against the problem of street children, but it raised its head again in the 2000s in the eastern metropolises such

as Diyarbakır. Both central and local governments must make the struggle against this problem their primary agenda. There will be important outcomes from this struggle in terms of the development of the social work profession in Turkey as well.

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