

THE ANALYSIS OF CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES FROM A SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

Oygun YAMAK

Marmara University
Faculty of Management
Anadoluhisari-Beykoz, Istanbul
E-mail: oygun.yamak@marmara.edu.tr

Burcu SUMER INCI

Marmara University
Faculty of Management
Anadoluhisari-Beykoz, Istanbul
E-mail: burcusumer@hotmail.com

Abstract

The child protection system is a part of social service system in Turkey and its services are carried out mainly by a special organization founded with this purpose. Its mission is mainly to protect children and prepare them to be ready to join the society. It also interacts with other social systems such as judicial, education system and health care system. The stakeholders of the system differ within a wide range from local administrations to ministries and government institutions and from NGO's to universities. This paper presents this system and its elements in depth and puts forward its strengths and weaknesses as well.

Keywords: *systems thinking, systems approach, child protection*

JEL Classification: M11

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Systems Concept and Systems Thinking

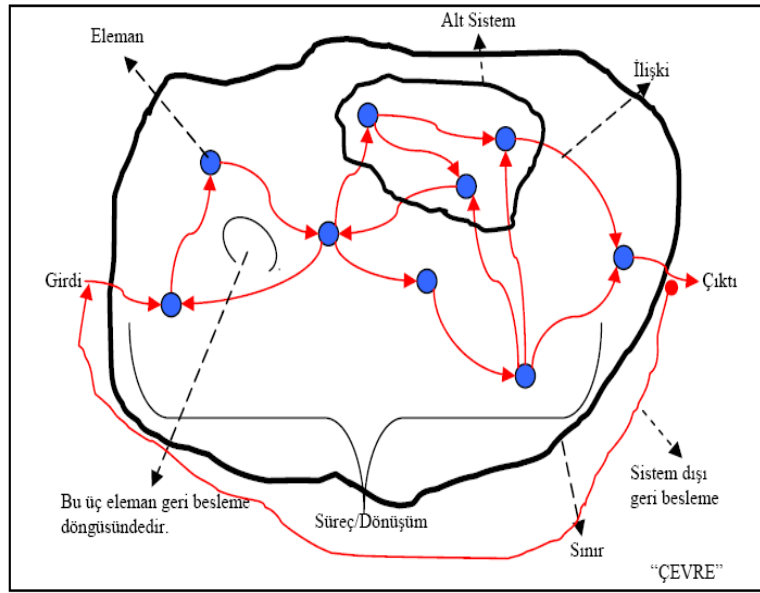
The world outside today has many complexities and systems interlapping each other; natural systems, man-made systems, chaos, fuzzy systems, deterministic or probabilistic systems and so on. In trying to understand the world's complexity we have a particular set of systems ideas which is called systems thinking. Systems theory has answers for complex systems thanks to the efforts of von Bertalanffy (1968) and Churchman (1968) and others including Checkland (1998).

A system is basically a whole or a compound which is made up of numerous or a finite number of parts or components which interact with each other and they constitute sub systems in a hierarchical order.

All social systems are open systems. Open systems are systems which get energy, information, material from environment and process them to obtain useful outputs which feed in turn as inputs to other systems in the environment. Environment covers everything that is outside the boundaries of the system which cannot be controlled by the system.

Fig.1 shows the structure of a system and its operations.

Figure-1: General structure of a complex social system



Source: Tecim: 2004: 83-86.

Systems approach tries to understand the problem by examining all the relevant elements. It is necessary to examine each element within its system; its role, interactions with other elements vice versa instead of separating it and examine. (Yamak, 2004: 10).

Systems approach, is not a panacea for solving all the problems of an organizations. Rather it is a methodology or a philosophy which makes it possible to better understand and analyze complex situations and increase the probability of making right decisions (Kast ve Rosenzweig, 1972: 462).

Sistem approach is a way of thinking, a philosophy aimed at examining events, situations not a new discipline. (Tecim, 2004: 79-80)

2. SOCIAL SERVICES SYSTEM

Every society has its specific social, legal, political, educational, health care, judicial systems designed and tailored to its particular needs. These systems have their own subsystems within their structures but on the other hand they also interact continuously with each other.

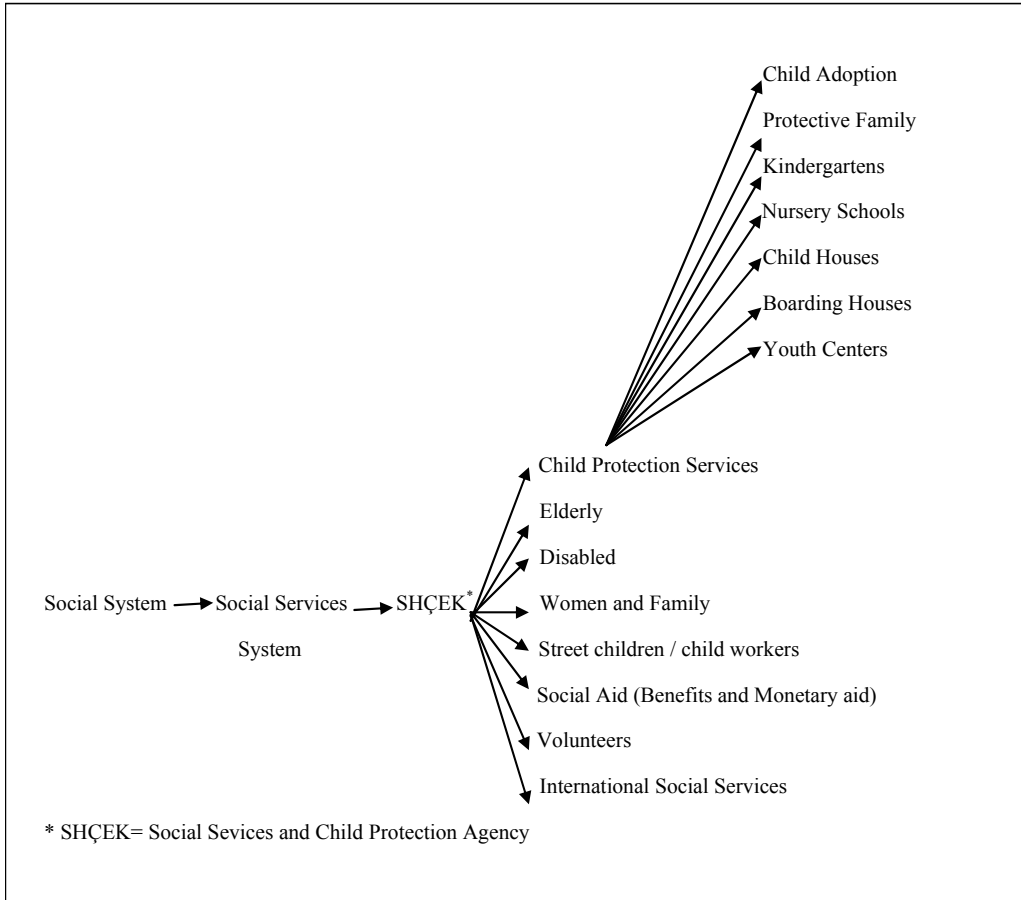
Fig.2 shows the overall structure of Social Services System and its subsystems. In this paper the Social Service System and one of its subsystem (Child Protection System) will be analyzed with systems approach.

2.1 Child Protection System as A Subsystem

The institution which takes care of children is the Social Services and Child Protection Agency (Sosyal Hizmetler ve Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu). This institution helps people who are not able to

pursue a decent life by themselves like disabled, elderly, pensions and also looks after children either orphan or street child or coming from poor families.

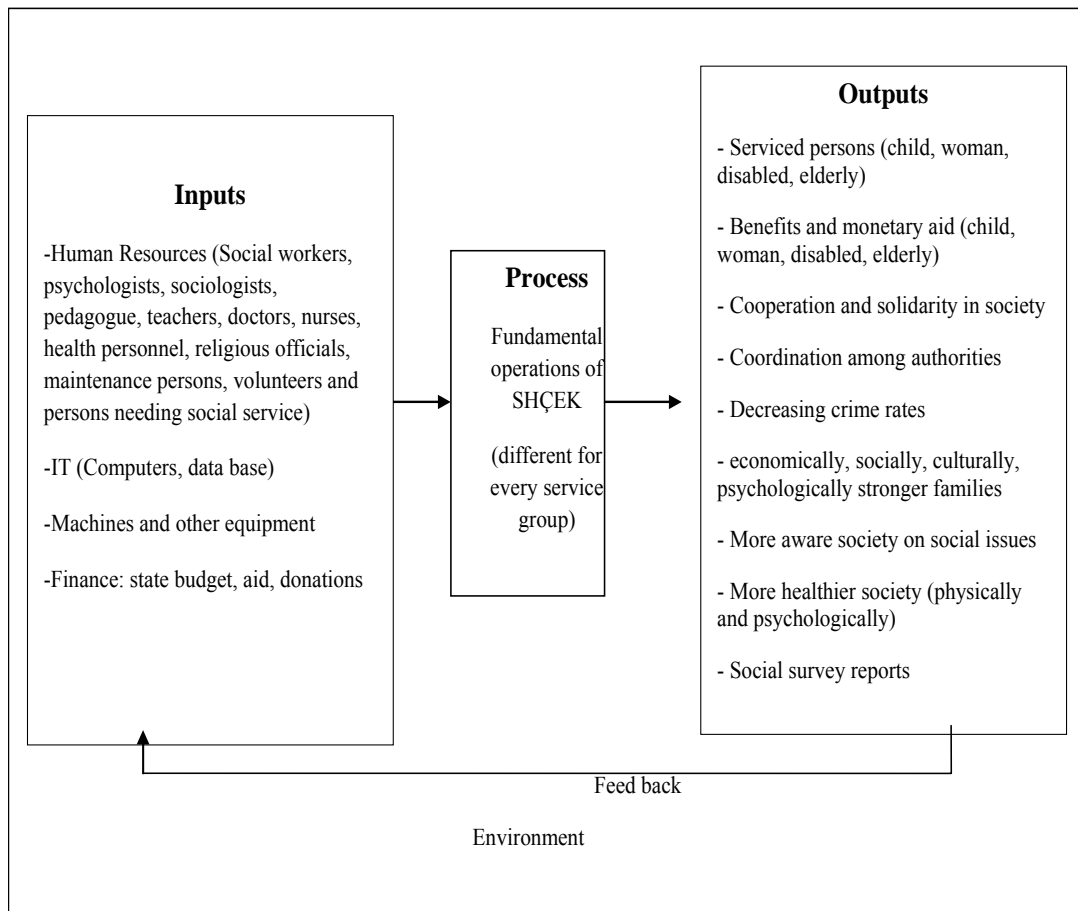
Figure-2: Social Services System and its subsystems



Source: Yamak, İnci (2010)

In every system there are 3 types of elements; namely inputs, a series of transformation process, outputs. Fig.3 shows these elements in a child protection system.

Figure-3: Social Services System and its elements

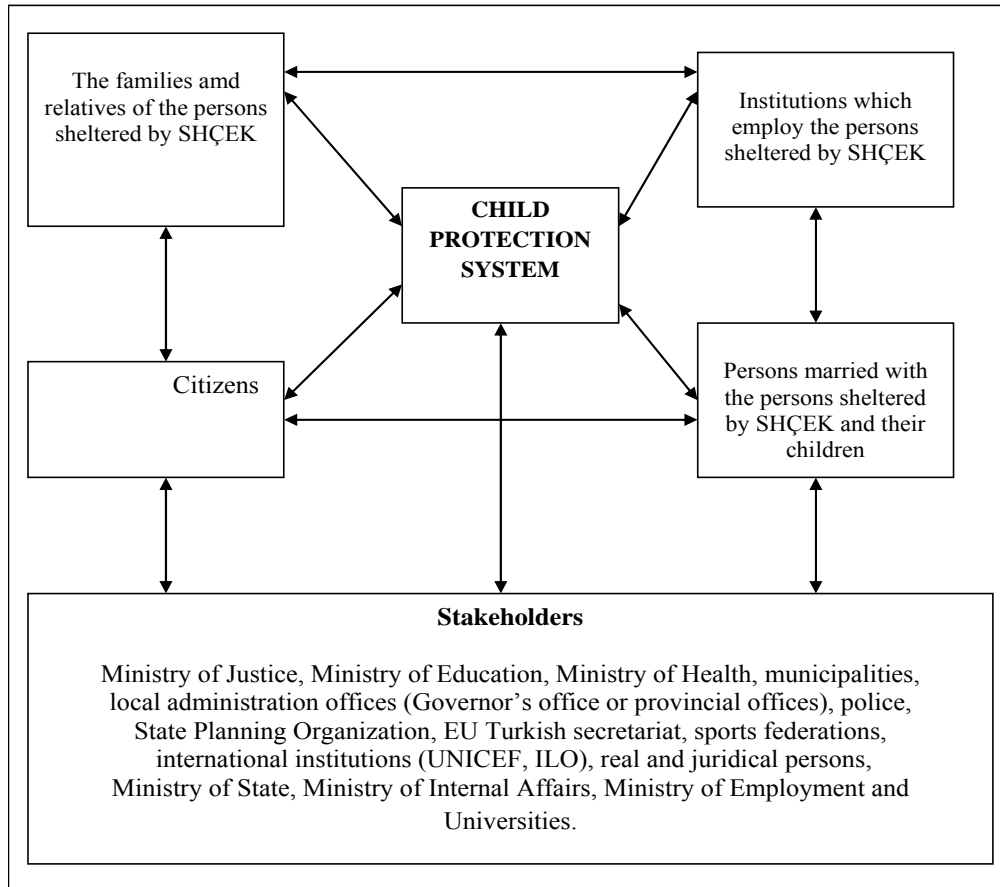


Source: Yamak, İnci (2010)

Process is to be examined in detail in the next section. Inputs are converted with the aid of processes into outputs. System's performance is dependent on the reliability and stability of its processes. Feed back plays an important role in achieving the system's objectives. Only thus it is possible to produce outputs as predetermined.

Every system has its own environment. Everything that falls outside the boundaries of the system constitutes its environment. System interacts with and survives within its environment. Altogether they make a bigger system on an upper level (Hicks and Gullett, 1981: 305). Fig. 4 presents the systems and institutions in interaction with each other in the environment of the child protection system.

Figure-4: Child protection system and its environment



Source: Yamak, İnci (2010)

The principal systems interacting with Child Protection System are judicial, health and education systems.

Their relations with child protection services system are briefly shown below:

- Judicial system: There are 2725 children at the reformatories in 2009 figures and of this figure only 319 are convicted the rest are detainees (www.radikal.com.tr on 6 January 2010). When they complete their sentences they are to be taken under the shelter of SHÇEK if believed they do not have enough protection outside.
- Education system: All children under the protection of SHÇEK continue their education with its support (monthly allowances for the children with families) there is also a continual effort to bring out-of-school children to schools.

- Health system: SHÇEK has the physical and psychical health responsibilities of all the children it protects. It employs doctors, psychologists, nurses and other health care personnel. In addition protected children could go to any state or university hospitals or out-patient clinics. In such cases all health care costs are to be paid by SHÇEK.

3. SOCIAL SERVICES AND CHILD PROTECTION AGENCY

3.1. An Outlook on Social Services Today

Although there are some differences in the systems there is similarities in strategic aim, mission, function, quality dimensions in the EU countries. Especially after World War II the share that social expenditures get from the GNP of those countries have shown tremendous improvements; over 50 per cent of overall government spendings (except England) of OECD countries by the end of 1970.

3.2. Social Services and Child Protection Agency

3.2.1. History

Its history goes as back as 1917 during the last days of Ottoman Empire. The name changed to TÇEK (Türkiye Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu) and became SHÇEK (Sosyal Hizmetler ve Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu) in 1983 and was inaugurated with other social services already in operation.

3.2.2. Other institutions

There are 660 installations managed by the institution.

3.2.3. Present state

3.2.3.1. Resources and Services

Number of employees 20358 of which 9637 works on a permanent based. 55 per cent of employees are having university degrees. Average number of years of employees worked is 12 according to 2007 figures.

3.2.3.2. Stakeholders

The first tier organizations which are directly interacting with SHÇEK are primary stakeholders such as Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, municipalities, local administration offices like Governor's office or provincial offices, police, State Planning Organization, EU Turkish secretariat, sports federations, international institutions (UNICEF, ILO), real and juridical (legal entities) persons.

The second tier organizations/entities are interacting indirectly therefore called secondary stakeholders; such as Ministry of State, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Employment and universities.

3.2.4. SWOT Analysis

Objective of this analysis is to establish the position of SHÇEK in its field of operation and put out its strengths and weaknesses.

3.2.4.1. SWOT Analysis Results: Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths of SHÇEK are as follows:

- **Capacity to respond to all demands:** The size of the operation area and the diversity of services forced the institution to get organized in 81 provinces. Family contact centers are accordingly increased by 143 per cent from 2002 to 2007. The number of children transferred from SHÇEK to families is 5026. Social grants are now being given to 18244 (2007 figure, 126 per cent rise in 5 years). SHÇEK, helps to locate nearly one child out of four in new families. "House care for disabled" started for the first time in 2007.
- **Employee satisfaction:** 77 per cent of the employees of SHÇEK stated that they are satisfied with their job.
- **Cooperation with stakeholders:** Institutions has projects (mainly infra structure) carried out with stake holders and joint works with local administrations such as municipalities and NGO's.
- **Revenue:** It has its own budget controlled by the Ministry and the standard deviation of revenues distributed among provinces is not high. There is an continuing effort in decreasing the costs by adding services such as 'house care'
- **Employment:** Number of employees has been increased including the new recruitments in sociologists and translators for the deaf.
- **Personnel Quality:** The ratio of personel with university certificates is 68 per cent.
- **Training and development:** The number of personnel has been steadily increasing. The number of persons who had on-the-job training in the period between 2003 and 2007 is 5430.
- **Data Access:** The access to information and documents in the institution can be reached anywhere in the world with ease and speed.
- **Infra-structure:** There is service network with sufficient infra-structure in 81 provinces.
- **IT and technical equipment:** There is sufficient amount of equipment and internet connections.
- **Emergency Precautions:** Fire fighting equipment and fire-escape stairs are present. Periodic controls for earthquake measures are done in the first zone regions.
- **Awareness:** Society has high awareness of SHÇEK and its installations.
- **Relations with EU:** There is an increase in the number of projects with EU. There are multi-lingual and experienced employees with international expertise. Collaboration with other institutions is improving by the help of EU projects.

Weaknesses of SHÇEK could be stated as follows:

- **Capacity to meet needs:** There is not enough legal base in use on proactive collaboration and cooperation among from the perspective of social service effectiveness. In some cases disabled children and street children are cared together with the other children. Protecting family model is not used widely because of people. There is not sufficient capacity in disabled/handicapped care institutions. No separate installations are present for the mentally handicapped children.

- **Organizational issues:** The organization culture and institutionalization has not been completed yet due to the recent integration of different institutions. Total Quality Management also has not been applied in all units.
- **Relations with stakeholders:** Cooperation in fields of health, education and culture are not established yet. 67 per cent of representatives of stakeholders have the slightest idea of what the most serious problem is in social services area.
- **Revenue:** The share of social spendings in Turkey's GNP is far behind the OECD countries. Budget allowances might not be released as quickly as possible. Quality and experience of personnel in preparing budget is inadequate. Cost of boarding children is quite high.
- **Personnel:** There is a lack of standards showing what the number of key personnel in terms of services should be. Diversity of services brings the issue of specialized personnel. All units state that there is a considerable lack of specialization.
- **Personnel quality:** In general, most of the human resources have considerable deficiencies including the computer illiteracy. Performance evaluation of personnel is not done. Motivation level is low among employees.
- **Training and development:** Sufficient resources are not reserved for this need.
- **Data access:** It is not in the contemporary standards and not suitable for the needs of the institution.
- **Physical infra-structure:** Physical infrastructure is inadequate both in number and quality.
- **Awareness:** Average person is not aware of what SHÇEK is actually doing. Only 42 per cent knows what it functions for but 93 per cent knows its title. 77 per cent is not aware of the services for disabled while 91 percent doesn't even know the benefits and monetary aids that it offers.
- **Relations with EU:** Legal personnel who speak and understand foreign languages and experienced in international law is absent.

3.3. Child Protection System and Its Subsystems

The subject of this paper is child protection services, so the other services or systems would not be tackled. Child protection services system also comprised of several subsystems such as child adoption services, protecting family services, child shelters, boarding houses, youth centers, kindergartens, nursery schools.

3.3.1. Child adoption services: Some of the children under shelter of SHÇEK are adopted by the suitable families. Each year about 500 children are being located as such.

3.3.2. Protecting family services: Children of problem families are relocated and taken care of temporarily or permanently by protecting families under state control. The family selection criteria are the same as in the case of child adoption process.

3.3.3. Nursery schools: 0-12 age group is looked after boarded at nursery schools.

3.3.4. Child shelters: Children of 0-12 age group is looked after in much smaller and friendly houses of 6-12 persons instead of a crowded nursery schools.

3.3.5. Boarding houses: Children of 13–18 age group stays in boarding houses. They can extend their stay if they continue their education by the age of 25. Each year 1200 youths in average are being employed by the state institutions.

3.3.6. Kindergarten: Takes care of children (0-6 age group) of working mothers.

3.3.7. Youth centers: Provides temporary shelter for street children and child workers for their rehabilitation and reorientation to the society.

Services for street child: This activity carried out by social workers and psychologists during specified hours at 44 youth centers dispersed in the country.

Mostly economic reasons are blamed for the existence of street child problem, though reasons such as in-family violence, sexual/physical abuse, insufficient social support, neglect, lack of affection, lack of education and poor communication between child and teacher are also worth noting.

These children work at job conditions which are harmful for their physical and psychological health and they are subject to all kinds of wrongdoing. They eventually become dependents of some addictive substance as well.

Therefore since this problem has a lot of different facets it requires a multi-functional look and an active and effective collaboration by governmental institutions and local organizations for a lasting solution.

Schooling: Special programs for literacy and schooling are put into use. Vocational courses are taught on many diverse fields.

Sports and cultural activities: Folklore, painting, music and the like.

Rehabilitation services: Treatment of children dependent on addictive substances by transferring them to special centers (UMATEM) formed with this purpose.

Integration with the society: voluntary services given by volunteers who contributes such services by distributing printed material informing people about such services. Also education support, social and cultural activities oriented for children are carried out by such volunteers.

4. CONCLUSION

The general trend in government's approach to child protection is reactive minded; when the problem occurs all the efforts are concentrated on finding solutions rather than applying proactive efforts. It is absolutely necessary to be in accordance with all the stakeholders to increase the effectiveness of preventive social services at least to minimize the number of problems pertaining to children if not eliminate them at all.

The most critical system among the systems interacting with Child Protection System is probably the Judicial System. Most of the children who stay at the reformatories are detainees and detainee period are getting longer. This long period on many occasions has helped turning the child into a criminal. This points out to a serious bottleneck in judicial system. Improvement in judicial system is also compulsory from this perspective.

Another point is that the amount Turkey reserves from its GNP for social spendings are far behind the OECD countries (13.2 per cent in 2001) while this is around 50 per cent in developed countries. The irony is that the number of individuals who need such services is much higher than that of those countries. This requires a dedicated, committed cooperation and coordination among the institutions within the context of such systems. People's awareness also should be increased. SHÇEK must be given a leading role in solving these problems.

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