



Refugee Children in the Scope of Mental Health Services at School

Okulda Ruh Sağlığı Hizmetleri Kapsamında Mülteci Çocuklar

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ABSTRACT

Schools play an important role in the psychosocial, academic, and professional development of refugee children. Specifically, psychological counselors and guidance (PCG) experts who provide mental health services in schools have a critical role in this process. The way of approach to the problems, areas of difficulty, support needs, and suggestions of PCG experts who have experience working with refugee children can increase the quality of the services to be provided in this direction. In this study based on qualitative design, the experiences of PCG experts who have worked with refugee children were examined. The data were collected from 38 PCG experts. The data were analyzed with the thematic analysis technique. As a result of the analyses, 27 sub-themes related to six themes were determined: the perceptions of the PCG experts about refugee children, their approach to refugee children, the demands of refugee children, the activities carried out for refugee children, the competence to work with refugee children, and effective intervention proposals for refugee children. It has been determined that PCG experts have a realistic perception of refugee children, they carry out various activities towards refugee children in a professional manner in line with their demands, and they develop various coping methods against difficulties in this process. Although working with refugee children contributes to improving the professional skills of PCG experts, PCG experts need training to giving effective services to refugee children such as non-language-based methods, trauma education, refugee rights, psychoeducation and play therapy activities. Based on PCG experts' experiences, they offer various recommendations for effective interventions for refugee children. In line with the results obtained, it has been evaluated that school counseling services can be the pioneer of activities to increase positive experiences in order to increase the mental health of refugee children.

Keywords: Refugee children, trauma, psychological counseling, cultural sensitivity

ÖZ

Mülteci çocukların psikososyal, akademik ve mesleki gelişiminde okullar önemli bir rol taşımaktadır. Özellikle okullarda ruh sağlığı hizmeti sunan PDR uzmanlarının bu süreçteki etkilerinin kritik olduğu bilinmektedir. Mülteci çocuklarla çalışma deneyimi olan PDR uzmanlarının sorunlara yaklaşım tarzları, zorlandıkları alanlar, destek ihtiyaçları ve önerilerinin belirlenmesi bu yönde sunulacak hizmetlerin niteliğini arttırabilmektedir. Bu çalışmada mülteci çocuklarla çalışma yürütmüş olan PDR uzmanlarının deneyimleri incelenmiştir. Fenomenolojik desenle tasarlanan araştırmada 38 PDR uzmanından veri toplanmıştır. Veriler, tematik analiz tekniğiyle analiz edilmiştir. Analizler sonucunda PDR uzmanlarının mülteci çocuklara ilişkin algıları, mülteci çocuklara yaklaşım tarzları, mülteci çocukların talepleri, mülteci çocuklara yönelik yürütülen çalışmalar, mülteci çocuklarla çalışabilme yetkinliği ve mülteci çocuklara yönelik etkili müdahale önerileri olmak üzere altı tema ve bu temalara bağlı 27 alt tema belirlenmiştir. PDR uzmanlarının mülteci çocuklara ilişkin gerçekçi bir algıya sahip oldukları, mülteci çocukların talepleri doğrultusunda kendilerine yönelik çeşitli faaliyetleri genel olarak profesyonel bir tutumla yürüttükleri, bu süreçte zorlandıkları bazı durumların olduğu ve bu durumlar karşısında çeşitli başa çıkma yöntemleri geliştirdikleri saptanmıştır. Mülteci çocuklarla çalışma, PDR uzmanlarının mesleki becerilerine katkı sunmakta, bununla birlikte PDR uzmanları, sundukları hizmetleri geliştirmek için dile dayanmayan yöntemler, travma eğitimi, mülteci hakları, psiko eğitim ve oyun gibi alanlarda eğitime ihtiyaç duymaktadır. PDR uzmanları, deneyimlerine dayanarak mülteci çocuklara yönelik etkili müdahaleler için çeşitli öneriler sunmaktadır. Elde edilen sonuçlar doğrultusunda okul PDR servislerinin, mülteci çocukların ruh sağlığını artırmak için olumlu deneyimleri artırıcı faaliyetlerin öncüsü olabileceği değerlendirilmiştir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Mülteci çocuklar, travma, psikolojik danışma, kültüre duyarlılık

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Introduction

Human beings are exposed to various changes throughout their lives and therefore, may experience some problems while trying to adapt to these changes. Some problems are observed in both the immigrant and the host society in the adaptation process after the migration movements. Serious problems emerge especially in the education of refugee children and it is observed that there is a need for effective research in this manner (Bozdağ 2018a, Serin and Bozdağ 2020).

While the concept of migration, one of the important sources of change in life, is defined differently, according to the Turkish Language Association [TDK] (2022), migration is “the act of moving individuals or communities from one country to another, from one settlement to another, for economic, social and political reasons.” It is striking that there are various conceptual confusions regarding the phenomenon of migration. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the concepts of immigrant, asylum seeker, and refugee in connection with migration. According to Erdoğan (2017), while individuals who encounter political problems in their own country and have to migrate to another and seek protection are asylum seekers; refugee is defined as an individual who has immigrated from their own country to another and whose protection request has been accepted due to the oppression they have or will suffer due to their race, religion, affiliation, social group, and political views. Therefore, the protection requests of refugees have been accepted while those of asylum seekers have not been accepted yet (Bozdağ 2020). Migrant, on the other hand, is used as a framework concept and includes all individuals who migrate for various reasons. (International Organization for Migration [IOM] 2019). In other words, the concept of immigrant is used for everyone who migrates, regardless of whether they are deemed as refugees, asylum seekers, or simply guests. Although a status called temporary protection status has been created for Syrian individuals in Turkey, the refugee concept was preferred in this study, considering both the fact that they have migrated due to war and political unrest that many years have passed since they migrated, and that it is consistent with the literature.

The movements that started in the Middle East countries in 2010 and were called the “Arab Spring” turned into a civil war in some countries at the beginning of 2011. One of the countries where the effects of the civil war are felt most intensely is Syria (Akpınar 2017). After the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, millions of people left their country and started migrating toward their border neighbors. Syria refugees mostly headed toward Turkey and Lebanon (Özdemir 2017). Currently, the Syrian population in Turkey is around 3,655,489 and 48,128 of this population are staying in temporary shelters, while 3,607,361 people are staying in different provinces of Turkey outside of temporary accommodation centers (GİB 2022). While approximately 1.6 million Syrian individuals living in Turkey are under the age of 18, the number of school-age children is over one million. However, according to the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund [UNICEF] (2019), 680,000 Syrian children are enrolled in schools, while nearly 400 thousand of

these children are deprived of education. According to the current data presented by the Ministry of National Education (MEB 2022), there are 1,365,884 foreign national school-age children (5-17 years old) in Turkey, 935,731 of these children are included in education, while 430.153 are excluded from education. According to Bozdağ (2018a), linguistic barriers, child labor, early marriage, traumatic experiences, discrimination, the legal status of parents, limited school areas, school fees, and security are some of the major problems that come to the fore in front of refugee children’s participation in education and furthermore, refugee children who attend school are exposed to discrimination and bullying, they are not familiar with the curriculum they are taught and have linguistic problems. In addition, teachers are not committed to the education at schools and most teachers and administrators do not want them there. Refugee children may experience behavioral problems and demonstrate low academic achievement because of such barriers.

Considering the fact that more than one million refugee children are in education and the problems they face, research on these children should be continued intensively. School plays an important role in the integration, bonding, and interaction of refugee children with society and in building their future. (Rousseau and Guzder 2008, Ergün 2022). Since the school has such an important function, the problems that refugee children experience at school can be an obstacle to the realization of this function (Ergün 2019). School administrators, teachers, and especially to PCG experts’ important responsibilities fall on them (Karaman and Bulut 2018). Mainly PCG experts and especially teachers and other school personnel should be aware of the psychosocial problems and needs of refugee children (Bozdağ 2018b). In a research conducted in Turkey with PCG experts was determined that they have communication problems (language problems with both students and parents) while working with Syrian refugees, they have insufficient knowledge about post-traumatic stress disorder, and they do not know how to intervene with the psychological problems experienced by refugee children, and they lack skills in counseling (Akay et al. 2017). In addition, the same study determined that Syrian refugee children experience problems such as low academic achievement, adjustment problems, the tendency to violence, exclusion/not being accepted, grouping, disciplinary problems, trauma, school absenteeism, introversion and financial inadequacy. In Ergün’s (2019) compiled study the work to be carried out by PCG experts with refugee children was identified as screening and detection studies, orientation and psychoeducation studies to increase the quality of the services provided, group studies to develop empathy between refugee students and local students, and empowering intervention programs to eliminate adaptation problems. It was further underlined that PCG experts should take on the role of advocacy especially for refugee children. Another compilation study by Kağnıcı (2017) pointed out that PCG experts should assume significant roles and responsibilities in refugee children’s adaptation to the school process. It was emphasized that these roles and responsibilities encompass many competencies, especially the cultural adaptation process and trauma knowledge,

multicultural counseling, and rights advocacy competencies in refugees. Similarly, the study conducted by Günlü et al. (2020) determined that the services performed by PCG experts for refugees facilitate the adaptation of students to school and are effective and necessary in terms of their psychological health. Moreover, it was indicated that PCG experts should improve their practical skills, especially in areas such as grief counseling and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Limited research has been conducted on the experience of PCG experts working with refugee children. While some of these studies are in the forms of reviews (Kağnıcı 2017, Karataş 2019, Ergün 2019, 2022), others are based on a qualitative research design (Akay et al. 2017, Türk et al. 2018, Günlü et al. 2020, Işık ve Kaynak 2020, Topaloğlu and Çam Aktaş 2022) Considering that Turkey is currently one of the countries hosting the highest number of refugees in the world (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] 2022) and the problems experienced by refugee children attending school, it is clear studies on PCG experts, who have a critical role in solving these problems are insufficient. Studies on the experiences of PCG experts working with refugee children, the difficulties they face, and their needs should be carried out in this respect, the current study scrutinizes the experience of PCG experts working with refugee children in terms of their approach to problems, the areas they encounter difficulties, their support needs and suggestions. It is aimed to carry out the psychosocial and educational efforts of PCG experts offered to refugee children more effectively.

Method

Research Design

This research, which examines the experiences of PCG experts working with refugee children, was designed in a phenomenological pattern, a qualitative research method. In the qualitative research method, qualitative data collection techniques such as observation, interview, and document analysis are used, and perceptions and events are tried to be revealed in a realistic and holistic way in the natural environment (Creswell 1998, Yıldırım and Şimşek 2013). The purpose of the phenomenological pattern is to understand human experiences (van Manen 2007). The phenomenological pattern is used to allow people to express their understanding, feelings, perceptions, and perspectives about a certain concept or phenomenon and to reveal how they experience them. (Rose et al. 1995). Based on this view, the present study also deals with the experiences of PCG experts working with refugee children in line with their subjective perceptions.

Study Group

The criterion sampling method was used while determining the study group of the research. In the criterion sampling method, various criteria are created in line with the purpose of the research, and participants who meet these criteria are included in the research (Yıldırım and Şimşek 2013). Criteria such as working as a PCG experts in a state educational institution, having at least

two years of experience in the field; refugee children to be studying in the educational institution, and working with these children were considered. In line with these criteria, PCG experts from different provinces of Turkey were informed about the research, and data were collected from the 46 PCG experts who agreed to participate in the research. During the data collection process, 2 PCG experts were excluded from the study group on the grounds that there were no refugee children in the educational institution they worked for, and 6 PCG experts did not work with refugee children. Therefore, analysis was carried out with the data out obtained from the remaining 38 PCG experts. Information about the study group of the research is presented in Table 1.

Twenty (53%) of the participants were women, 18 (47%) were men, and most of them (87%) had a bachelor's degree. When the graduation areas are examined, it is observed that most of the participants are PCG graduates (84%), however, psychology, education programs, and teaching, philosophy, and sociology graduates were also included in the study group. The time spent by the participants in these professions varies between 2 and 17 years, and almost all (95%) work in public schools. Participants included in the study were from different cities such as Mardin, Istanbul, Batman, Diyarbakır, Sakarya, Hatay, Adıyaman, İzmir, Kayseri and Şanlıurfa.

Data Collection Tools and Process

First, Ethics Committee Approval was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Istanbul University-Cerrahpaşa (Date and Number: 13/10/2020-135144) in order to conduct this study. "Personal Information Form" and "Structured Interview Form" were prepared in order to collect data for the research. Voluntary consent was obtained from the participants. Information about the participants' gender, age, education level, graduation area, length of work in the profession, the type and level of school, and the city they work at were collected via the Personal Information Form. Questions about the general approach to refugee children, the request for help of refugee children, the work for refugee children, the problems experienced with refugee children, the ways of coping with these problems, competencies, and deficiencies were included in the Structured Interview Form. Some of the sample questions are presented below.

How would you evaluate your approach towards refugee children in general?

Do you have any efforts targeting refugee children at school? What kind of efforts, if any?

Is there a request for help from the PCG service for refugee children? If yes, on what subjects?

Has working with refugee children contributed to your professional skills? If yes, what kind of contributions?

Interviews with the participants were carried out by the researchers who conducted the study. Interviewers are people who have doctoral education in the field of PCG, have conducted qualitative research before, and are competent to conduct

Table 1. Demographic information about the study group

Code	Age	Gender	Level of education	Graduation area	Seniority	Type of school attended	School level at which they work	Province of the school
K1	26	Female	Bachelor	PCG	4 years	State school	Primary school	Adıyaman
K2	30	Female	Bachelor	PCG	6 years	State school	High school	Mardin
K3	30	Female	Bachelor	PCG	7 years	State school	High school	Batman
K4	25	Male	Bachelor	PCG	3 years	State school	High school	Batman
K5	30	Female	Bachelor	PCG	7 years	State school	High school	Batman
K6	33	Male	Bachelor	PCG	9 years	State school	High school	Batman
K7	42	Male	Bachelor	Psychology	17 years	State school	Middle School	Diyarbakır
K8	32	Male	Postgraduate	PCG	9 years	State school	Middle School	Diyarbakır
K9	28	Female	Bachelor	PCG	6 years	State school	Middle School	Istanbul
K10	28	Female	Bachelor	PCG	6 years	State school	Middle School	Hatay
K11	47	Female	Bachelor	CT	20 years	State school	High school	Hatay
K12	32	Male	Postgraduate	PCG	8 years	State school	High school	Istanbul
K13	32	Female	Bachelor	Psychology	3 years	State school	Primary school	Istanbul
K14	24	Female	Bachelor	PCG	2 years	State school	Primary school	Istanbul
K15	26	Male	Bachelor	PCG	2 years	TEC	High school	Istanbul
K16	24	Female	Bachelor	PCG	3 years	State school	Primary school	Istanbul
K17	26	Female	Bachelor	PCG	5 years	State school	Primary school	Istanbul
K18	35	Male	Postgraduate	PCG	14 years	State school	High school	İzmir
K19	30	Male	Bachelor	PCG	7 years	State school	Middle School	Kayseri
K20	32	Male	Bachelor	PCG	6 years	State school	Primary school	Mardin
K21	24	Female	Bachelor	PCG	2 years	State school	Middle School	Istanbul
K22	24	Female	Bachelor	PCG	2 years	State school	Middle School	Mardin
K23	30	Female	Bachelor	Philosophy	7 years	State school	Primary school	Mardin
K24	28	Male	Bachelor	PCG	6 years	State school	Primary school	Mardin
K25	26	Male	Bachelor	PCG	3 years	State school	Primary school	Mardin
K26	32	Male	Bachelor	PCG	6 years	State school	Middle School	Mardin
K27	38	Male	Bachelor	PCG	16 years	State school	High school	Mardin
K28	25	Male	Bachelor	PCG	2 years	State school	Primary school	Mardin
K29	32	Female	Postgraduate	Sociology	7 years	State school	Middle School	Mardin
K30	34	Male	Postgraduate	Sociology	7 years	State school	Primary school	Mardin
K31	27	Male	Bachelor	PCG	4 years	State school	Middle School	Mardin
K32	25	Male	Bachelor	PCG	2 years	State school	Primary school	Mardin
K33	32	Male	Bachelor	PCG	9 years	State school	Middle School	Mardin
K34	28	Female	Bachelor	PCG	6 years	State school	Middle School	Mardin
K35	24	Female	Bachelor	PCG	2 years	State school	Primary school	Sakarya
K36	41	Female	Bachelor	PCG	15 years	State school	Middle School	Sakarya
K37	24	Female	Bachelor	PCG	2 years	TEC	High school	Istanbul
K38	24	Female	Bachelor	PCG	3 years	State school	Primary school	Şanlıurfa

PCG: Psychological counseling and guidance, CT: Curriculum and teaching, TEC: Temporary education center.

interviews in this context. They received training on research methods and data collection techniques both in undergraduate and graduate studies and gained skills in interviewing methods within the scope of psychological evaluation and individual recognition techniques. The interviews conducted by the researchers of the study lasted an average of 20 minutes for each participant.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed with the thematic analysis technique. In thematic analysis technique, it is aimed to identify, analyze and report the themes in the data. The data set is arranged in the smallest dimensions and described in depth (Boyatzis 1998). The thematic analysis technique is divided into two inductive and theoretical (deductive). The current study used an inductive thematic analysis technique. Inductive thematic analysis is completely data-based. It is a data coding process, which does not try to fit the data into a predetermined coding framework or the researcher's theoretical knowledge (Braun and Clarke 2019). Braun and Clarke (2019) explain thematic analysis with a six-step process. This process includes familiarization with the data, creating initial codes, searching for, reviewing, defining, and naming the themes, and preparing the report. Following the specified process, the research data were analyzed and reported in six steps.

During the data analysis process, the data set was reviewed and read by the researchers at different times, and familiarity with the data was ensured. Then, the first codes were created and themes were searched, and sub-themes and themes were determined. Sub-themes and themes were reviewed, defined, and named. The sub-themes and themes used in similar studies in the literature (eg. Akay et al. 2017, Günlü et al. 2020, Işık

ve Kaynak 2020, Topaloğlu and Çam Aktaş 2022, Türk et al.) were considered for determining the sub-themes and themes. While reviewing, defining, and naming codes and themes for consistency, opinions from different specialists were obtained and the consensus was achieved. Transmissibility by presenting participant characteristics and direct citations of participants in findings; credibility by enabling participants to answer questions comfortably and sincerely, and confirmability by recording and filing the responses of the participants were achieved.

Results

As a result of the thematic analysis, six themes and 27 sub-themes were identified regarding the experiences of PCG experts working with refugee children. These are presented in order below.

Perception Regarding Refugee Children

When the perceptions of PCG experts regarding refugee children are examined, it is observed that they are clustered under three sub-themes: "advantage", "disadvantage" and "difference". PCG experts evaluating the general situation of refugee children consider this situation as an advantage on one hand and a disadvantage on the other. In addition, differences regarding the general situation of refugee children were also emphasized.

One of the PCG experts highlighting the advantages regarding the general situation of refugee children noted "*On the positive side, they are truly loving. This allows them to be comfortable and friendly in the community as long as they don't have any other issues bothering them. They are eager to participate in activities (P21, 24 years old, female).*" Another noted, "*Perception levels are good. Those who receive family support and do not have financial problems are more open to learning (P27, 38 years old, male).*"

THEMES	• SUB-THEMES
1. Perception regarding refugee children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.1. Advantage • 1.2. Disadvantage • 1.3. Difference
2. Approach towards refugee children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.1. Professional approach • 2.2. Unprofessional approach
3. Requests of refugee children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3.1. Psychosocial support • 3.2. Academic support • 3.3. Economic support 3.4. Linguistic support 3.5. No request
4. Studies carried out for refugee children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4.1. Personal-social • 4.2. Educational • 4.3. Professional • 4.4. Family studies 4.5. Group work 4.6. Individual Studies 4.7. Project studies
5. Ability to work with refugee children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5.1. Difficult aspects • 5.2. Easy aspects • 5.3. Dealing with difficult aspects • 5.4. Evaluation techniques 5.5. Contribution to professional skill 5.6. Areas that felt inadequate 5.7. Education need
6. Effective intervention recommendations for refugee children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6.1. Personal-social • 6.2. Educational • 6.3. Professional

Figure 1. Themes and sub-themes determined in the research

Considering the sample statements of the participants regarding the disadvantage sub-theme, “The problem areas are not related to them, but there is a general state of uncertainty as well as problems based on integration, language, and economy (P30, 34 years old, male).” and “The enrollment of older students for the class poses a huge problem. For example, when a 6-year-old child and a 9-year-old refugee child are in the same class, certain problems can arise. Mostly violence problems occur (P38, 24 years old, female).” As these statements of the participants’ show, it can be asserted that disadvantaged situations are caused by systemic factors rather than individual factors.

The following statements of one of the participants regarding the differences between refugee children draw attention: “There is polygamy in families when a woman gets married, they do not take her husband’s surname and continue to use their father’s surname. In early marriage, girls are married at the age of 13-14. They like food more spicy and spicy food. Women are generally not valued and left in the background, as are girls. There is inequality between men and

women. They are not open to innovations as a society, they are more of a closed society. They speak very loudly when speaking Arabic. They are very talented at painting. They are afraid of making mistakes. They used ballpoint pens in the exams. In Syria, even if they get 90 points instead of 100, they get very upset and cry (P16, 24 years old, female).” Another participant describes the differences as “The way they use gestures and facial expressions are the first thing that draws attention. The gender gap is culturally predictable, but it’s more than you might think. Unlike my culture, they tend to be intimidated religiously. Other than that, I did not see any big compelling distinctions (P21, 24 years old, female).” While another explained, “We have three siblings, they are much more mature and academically better than our students (F5, 30 years old, female).”

Approach Towards Refugee Children

The approaches of PCG experts toward refugee children are explained under the second theme of the study. These are presented in Table 3.

Table 2. Perception regarding refugee children

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Perception regarding refugee children	Advantage	Academic success Showing effort Desire to learn a language Sensitivity and sympathy Desire to attend events Raising awareness for respecting differences Communication Good English skills Solidarity within themselves Being thankful Maturity
	Disadvantage	Lack of development of belonging Indifference of the family Problems with peers and teachers Behavioral problems Linguistic barriers Discipline issues Economic problems Pubertas praecox Grouping Aggression/violence/anger Being an introvert-silent
	Difference	Being in uncertainty Skin care culture Gender inequality Polygamy Maturity Linguistic differences Religious competence Difference in the education system Early marriage Low economic level Sleeping late at night Clothing differences Being afraid of making mistakes Use of gestures and facial expressions Introversion Lack of jobs Large family
		Confidence Psychological resilience Sincerity Respect Sense of responsibility Success in sports-artistic activities Sociability Compatibility Parent involvement Helpfulness
		Communication problems Being late for school/indifference Reluctance to learn Not being in classes appropriate for their level Failure in social lessons Intentionally speaking in their language Disobeying the rules Cultural differences Adaptation issues Bullying
		Cultural difference Culture clash Perception of being a guest Authoritarian parental attitude Ability to paint Using a ballpoint pen in exams Tendency to violence Being demanding Difficult life events/trauma Being conservative/submissive Adaptation issues Foreign language knowledge Eating and drinking habits High solidarity High anxiety Talking very loudly Poor communication skills

It is understood from the analysis results that PCG experts generally adopt a professional approach towards refugee children. This is reflected in the sample expressions of the participants as below:

“I try to be equal and fair as I approach other students (P1, 26 years old, female).” “I act supportive for them to express themselves (P4, 25 years old, male).” “I don’t perceive them as refugees, but as children or adolescents (P12, 32 years old, male).” “I treat refugee children the same way I treat other students at our school. I try to deal with their problems closely (P22, 24 years old, female).” “As someone who has experienced forced migration, I think I am more empathetic. I believe that every child in the world is valuable from this point of view, I believe that the rights of every child do not change according to geography, economic situation, ethnic and religious origin (P26, 32 years old, male).” “If every child is special, whatever their religion, language, race, nationality, color, they deserve to be valued. The right to education cannot be taken away from any child (P34, 28 years old, female).” However, although it can be considered a well-intentioned approach, some non-professional approaches are adopted by PCG experts as observed from the following expressions:

“I generally approach refugee students with a more understanding and compassionate approach. I realize that most of the time I have sympathy rather than empathy (P9, 28 years old, female). I am cautious. I have difficulties with language (P13, 32 years old, female). We are taking a more compassionate and optimistic approach to refugee children (P38, 24 years old, female).” Although these approaches do not harm refugee children, they can be a barrier for them to realize their potential. Moreover, the PCG experts intensely adopt these approaches may cause them to move away from a rights-based approach while providing mental health services.

Requests of Refugee Children

The third theme identified in the research includes the requests of refugee children from the PCG service. These requests are presented in Table 4.

Some PCG experts reported that refugee children do not have any requests from the PCG service. However, it is observed that these requests of refugee children can be classified as psychosocial, academic, economic, and linguistic support. Sample expressions of the participants regarding these demands were: “They had no academic problems. It was noticed that they were experiencing

Table 3. Approach toward refugee children

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Approach toward refugee children	Professional approach	Open Understanding Supportive Thoughtful Empathetic Equal and fair Sensitive Tolerant Humanist Optimistic
	Unprofessional approach	Merciful Sympathetic Wary

Table 4. Requests of refugee children

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Requests of refugee children	Psychosocial support	Family communication Domestic problem Peer bullying Friendship relations Stigma Exclusion
	Academic support	Academic success Study schedule School adjustment
	Economic support	Economic need Economic problem
	Linguistic support	Linguistic problems Communication problems
	No request	No request

economic difficulties, and studies were carried out in this direction (P5, 30-year-old female). "Like other students, they mostly seek help with peer relationships. It may be necessary to intervene and ensure a homogeneous distribution when there are groupings, especially in classrooms where Syrian students are concentrated. Sometimes they are ostracized by Turkish students because they have a different culture or attitude. ... I translate the exams of English-speaking students because they have trouble transferring their real academic skills and knowledge to the exam paper due to language differences. ... Sometimes teachers also use nationalist rhetoric against Syrian students... (P9, 28 years old, female)." "They apply to the guidance service, especially in friendship and family communication (P5, 26 years old, male)." "They often have trouble adapting. Not only in terms of environment and language, but also in terms of their goals and futures. Adapting to the future in an unfamiliar place is also a problem for them (P21, 24 years old, female)." "We have more problems with nicknames. Because they are Syrian, they can be labeled (P38, 24 years old, female)." .

Studies carried out for refugee children When the studies carried out by PCG experts for refugee children are examined, it is observed that these studies differ in personal-social, educational, and professional areas, and individual and group studies are also carried out in these areas. Furthermore, studies are carried out

with their families about refugee children, and various projects are performed.

PCG experts describes what kind of work they do for refugee children with the following words: "I do group work, help with translations in the exam, meetings with their parents, meetings with all foreign students to get information about their needs and problems, I organize activities on empathy, respect for differences and conflict resolution in the classroom environment. Also, I have worked with trauma-focused students in individual interviews. Career counseling is among the most frequently conducted studies for 5th-grade students (P9, 28 years old, female)." "They need support on problem-solving strategies and social adaptation in general, we prepare this in the framework program we prepared at the beginning of the year and we try to implement it throughout the year (P15, 26 years old, male)." "I let them know that they can come to me whenever they have a problem since I know Arabic (daily speaking language). This makes them feel good. Since the school I am currently at is a school within the scope of the PICTES project, there are programs for refugee children (P18, 35 years old, male)." "I conduct periodic meetings both in the classroom environment and in the guidance service. We also make home visits (P27, 38 years old, male) to meet their families and observe them in their home environment." "We are in constant communication with the class teachers. After some violent incidents, we gathered the

Table 5. Studies carried out for refugee children

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Studies carried out for refugee children	Personal-social	Peer support Peer bullying Peer relationships Fighting addiction Conflict resolution Behavioral problems Empathy Respect for differences
	Educational	Academic support Educational success Exam anxiety Efficient working methods
	Professional	Career counseling Career planning
	Family studies	Family visit Family seminars Parent interviews Parent meetings
	Group work	Teamwork Group guidance Group counseling Needs analysis Orientation Psychoeducation Seminars In-class activities Social activities
	Individual studies	Individual interviews Individual psychological counseling
	Project studies	PICTES Projects

Table 6. Ability to work with refugee children

Theme	Sub-theme	Code	
Ability to work with refugee children	Difficult aspects	Excessive expectation of attention Separation Language barrier Irregularity in education Grouping Introversion Communication problem Stereotypes	Financial problems Lack of motivation Negative family attitudes Prejudices Violence issues Adaptation issues Inadequate time Tyranny
	Easy aspects	Clarity of perception Cooperation with the family Hospitality of the family Valuing information Demanding to be valued No resistance Being empathetic Effective Listening Friendliness Clear communication Being interested Being cooperative	Willingness to stand on one's own feet Curiosity Being clear Homework awareness Willingness to learn Sincerity Respect Affection/friendliness Demand to be loved Following what is said Compatibility
	Dealing with difficult aspects	Peer support Individual psychological counseling Language courses/support Planning in education Effective Listening Presenting different perspectives Group guidance Presenting opportunities	Speaking English Being a model Developing self-confidence Reinforcing patience and strong emotions Giving responsibility Translator support Getting support from foundations/ volunteers Collaboration with parents
	Evaluation techniques	Considering individual differences Considering gender characteristics Empathizing Building trust Being sensitive Using two-choice assessment techniques Encouraging for self-expression Using short, clear, and clear instructions	Demonstrating a culturally sensitive approach Considering cultural differences Considering CV/life experiences Considering the socioeconomic level Making use of non-verbal communication Receiving translator support Giving enough explanation
	Contribution to professional skill	Research request Developing a culture of coexistence and tolerance Learning a language Learning non-language communication Emotion control Developing empathy skills Getting to know a different culture Learning different education systems Trying different ways of communication Learning different exam systems Working with different cases	Opportunity to try different methods Improving English speaking Competence in loss and bereavement Personal development Developing cultural sensitivity Developing leadership skills Increasing job satisfaction Application of psychoeducation program Learning psychodrama Trauma training/competence Ability to work with difficult students
	Areas that felt inadequate	Language problem Communication problem Professional dissatisfaction Not being proficient in PTSD	
	Education need	Non-linguistic methods Training on working with emotions EMDR training Different communication methods Training to work with refugee children Refugee rights	Information on the lives of refugees Game training Psychodrama training Psychoeducation Trauma training

parents and held an informative meeting with an interpreter. We explained to them about the school rules and how the system works here. We listened to their expectations from us. It was very helpful (P38, 24 years old, female).”

Ability to Work with Refugee Children

This theme includes the difficult and easy aspects of working with refugee children, the methods of coping with difficult aspects, the points considered in the assessment techniques, the contribution of working with refugee children to professional skills, the areas PCG experts feel inadequate and their training needs in this area.

PCG experts explain the difficult aspects of working with refugee children and methods of coping with them as follows: “We have difficulties with language. The solution is there is a Syrian teacher in our school (P1, 26 years old, female).” “There is a language problem, and we try to solve it with friends who speak that language (P2, 30 years old, female).” “We did not face any problems with the refugee children in our school so far. In the first days, they perceived themselves as a little apart from the group. After they were handed over responsibilities in classroom work, they started to take ownership of their class and school (P5, 30 years old, female).” “We try to overcome the language barrier through other translators or, if they speak English, by speaking in the common language. We follow a

policy of disbanding the group when they group among themselves. If the student has a developmental delay or has a superior performance in any area, they should be referred to RAM, but these students are deprived because the RAM does not provide language support (P9, 28 years old, female).” “Since there is no planned transition and language education, both children and school have a hard time. The child is placed in the classroom and they learn whatever they can there. That’s it. We cannot cope. State planning and support are essential in this regard. Children should go to a language course or even a preparatory class outside of school and study with their peers (P13, 32 years old, female).” “There are difficulties in communication caused by not knowing the language well. Our Syrian trainers are helpful in this regard. Since most of them are younger than those in their class, they sometimes engage in bullying behavior (P32, 25 years old, male).” “Language problem. Reliable students and teachers are used as translators. There is the problem of violence among students. We try to cooperate by involving parents as much as possible (P37, 24 years old, female).”

On the other hand, some said: “Their families are more disciplined, or rather authoritarian, and when you communicate with the family, there are positive changes in the child’s behavior. They find the approach of teachers in Turkey more friendly, flexible and open to communication (P9, 28 years old, female).” “When they don’t

Table 7. Effective intervention recommendations for refugee children

Tema	Alt tema	Kod	
Mülteci çocuklara yönelik etkili müdahale önerileri	Kişisel-sosyal	Aileye müşavirlik Aileyle çalışma Atılganlık eğitimi Birlikte yaşama becerisi Bütünleştirme Olumlu akran ilişkileri Uyum çalışmaları Dili ve kültürü bilenlerden destek alma Drama Empati Grupla psikolojik danışma Grup rehberliği Güven ve umut aşılama İhmal-istismar İletişim Kamu spotları (çocuk ve insan hakları)	Kültürü anlama Masal terapi Medyada suçlayıcı/dışlayıcı unsurların engellenmesi Mültecilere yönelik bilgilendirme Olumlu benlik algısı Olumlu davranış geliştirme Oyun Öfke kontrolü Özgüven geliştirme Öz kültürün yaşanmasının sağlanması Sosyal beceri eğitimi Sosyal etkinlikler Sportif faaliyetler Temel ihtiyaçların giderilmesi Tiyatro Travma/TSSB
	Eğitsel	Aile desteği Aile eğitimi Akademik destek Arapça bilen personel desteği Ders çalışma programı düzenleme Dil eğitimi/desteği Eğitsel oyunlar Eğitsel bilgilendirme/imkan sunma Eğitim sistemi hakkında bilgi sunma	Materyal/kaynak eksikliklerinin giderilmesi Motivasyon çalışmaları Müfredat çalışmaları Okul personelinin işbirliği Okula aidiyetin geliştirilmesi Okula uyum Öğretmen desteği Seviyeye uygun eğitim sunma
	Mesleki	Ailelere istihdamın sağlanması Mesleki bilgilendirme/egitim Mesleki fırsatları tanıtma Mesleki belirsizliği giderme Meslek grupları hakkında bilgi/tanıtım	

understand what you are saying, they have a very innocent smile on their faces. I find it affectionate and friendly (P12, 32 years old, male).” “They are open to cooperation and when they see that we are helping them, they feel valued (P15, 26 years old, male).” “Since they need so much attention, the smallest work you do with them yields important results. The simplest example is when you smile and say how are you, this is a very happy event for that student, they are happy all day long. They love and respect unconditionally (P16, 24 years old, female).” “Having clear problems or curiosities. So, if there is something they want to share with you, they tell you directly. I guess it’s because they have to speak a different language. They know few words and try to explain in the shortest way. You do not wonder if there is another underlying condition, frankly (P21, 24 years old, female). Their social communication is very good. They know the concept of empathy very well. Their families are very hospitable (P27, 38 years old, male).” “The importance they attach to standing on their own feet as a result of valuing knowledge and experiencing life at a very early age is our most important source of inspiration (P34, 28 years old, female).” These statements also reflect the easy aspects of working with refugee children.

PCG experts state that they pay attention to some points when using assessment techniques for refugee children. The statements of the participants regarding these are as follows: “I act more sensitive in interviews, and in tests, I make explanations where they do not understand (P2, 30 years old, female).” “I consider that they come from different geography. It can also be called cultural sensitivity (P8, 32 years old, male).” “If they do not know Turkish, I try to offer them the opportunity to express themselves. I pay attention to intervene in the problems he mentions. I take care not to speak in a generalizing style like Turks or foreigners (P9, 28 years old, female).” “Since we have difficulties with language, I pay more attention to things like body language, facial expressions, tone of voice. I use pictures (P13, 32 years old, female).” “Cultural differences need to be considered. Knowing the traumatic situations such as war and migration and their experiences so far and testing, interviewing, etc. accordingly. (P16, 24 years old, female).” “Since there may be difficulties due to cultural differences, I try to evaluate children within their culture (P17, 26 years old, female).” “To be precise and clear. Being able to answer with clear answers such as yes or no instead of multiple choices (P21, 24 years old, female).”

The contribution of working with refugee children to professional skills was explained as follows: “You meet a different culture, you learn about that culture (P2, 30 years old, female).” “Working with an individual from a different culture allowed me to push my professional skills a little bit further and try different methods (P4, 25 years old, male).” “I have reached more satisfaction in terms of profession. Trauma, loss, bereavement enabled us to look at such events more professionally and to work in this direction (P16, 24 years old, female).” “I learned a little bit about the education systems of different geographies and discovered that being a refugee is more difficult than it seems (P18, 35 years old, male).” “I encountered events in a very short time that I would probably not encounter with a psychological counselor who normally works for many years. This pushed me to constantly research, think and make quick decisions. We did not work on refugee children in my undergraduate education. I found myself in

a completely different field, but I think it contributed a lot to me and shaped my perception of myself and the environment (P21, 24 years old, female).” “Since I personally took part in the UNICEF project, I had training for teachers who have foreign students in their class. Seeing that their prejudices were broken and raising awareness was my greatest source of joy (P34, 28 years old, female).” expressed in terms such as

PCG experts explain the areas where they feel inadequate to work with refugee children and their educational needs accordingly as follows: “I was challenged because I was not competent in post-traumatic stress disorder (P3, 30 years old female).” “I have a hard time with the language. I would like to receive training on refugee rights (P11, 47 years old, female).” “I would like to know the language of the person in front of me since it is a difficult situation not knowing the language and not being able to communicate by speaking. Or I can receive different pieces of training to support communication (P14, 24 years old, female).” “I feel inadequate when I cannot communicate with children. I would like to receive all the training where the language is not used. In this case, we speak through the translator (P16, 24 years old, female).” “Especially the anger problem, which seems simple to me, is a very pressing issue in itself. I would prefer training that can help me, especially when working with emotions (P21, 24 years old, female).” “From time to time, I think about which approach would be more beneficial for them. I would like to receive training on what should we pay attention to when working with refugee children etc. (P22, 24 years old, female).” “I encounter problems with language. Therefore, I would like to receive training on methods other than verbal communication. Like printing interpretation techniques (P26, 32 years old, male).”

Effective Intervention Recommendations For Refugee Children

This theme includes effective intervention recommendations for PCG experts working with refugee children. These recommendations are offered in personal-social, educational, and professional fields.

PCG experts stated their suggestions in personal-social, educational, and professional fields as follows: “Supportive educational classes can be opened in the courses they are left behind (P2, 30 years old, female).” “Children must learn the language first, we already have knowledge and methods in other areas. If we can agree, we can use them. Families should be educated. Families live in ghettos. It is as if the children would not live here, and therefore, issues such as education/work seem unimportant. On the other hand, they are not talking about going back to their own countries. Families should be made aware of the importance of education (P13, 32 years old, female).” “Material and resource deficiencies should be eliminated and they should be enriched. Studies can be carried out to introduce professional opportunities. Studies should also be carried out with the family to ensure the development of the child in the personal-social field (P14, 24 years old, female).” “Educational and vocational information studies are the subjects they need the most. Both students and parents. You should start from the basics. But it is possible to work on personal self-expression and understanding others. Considering the environment they came from, I think they need help in interpersonal

relations (P21, 24 years old, female).” “Training in which success stories and intervention methods from experienced teachers who have worked with refugee students is explained in detail. Detailed and clear information should be provided about the educational opportunities offered to refugee students. Social activity opportunities should be increased (P37, 24 years old, female).”

Discussion

Educational institutions and especially PCG experts working in these institutions have an important impact on the cultural acculturation processes of refugee children, in other words, in the psychological and social adaptation processes, educational institutions, and especially those working in these institutions (Türk et al. 2018, Karataş 2019, Işık and Kaynak 2020). Therefore, the perceptions of PCG experts regarding refugee children should be taken into account. According to the findings of this study, PCG experts consider the general situation of refugee children as an advantage on one hand, and as a disadvantage on the other. In addition, they also express their evaluations in this direction by emphasizing the differences between refugee children. This result obtained by this study is supported and consistent with the results of the study conducted by the study of Işık ve Kaynak (2020) on PCG experts working in GEMs and their perceptions regarding refugee children. In that study, the perceptions PCG experts regarding refugee children were categorized under categories such as damaged, needing support/labor/direction, struggling structure, strengths, and wealth. It is observed that these categories emphasize the advantages and disadvantages of refugee children. On the other hand, in the research conducted by Topaloğlu and Çam Aktaş (2022), the problems experienced by refugee children were considered from the point of view of PCG experts and generally focused on disadvantaged situations. PCG experts working with refugee children to develop positive perspectives toward these children are important in terms of increasing the quality of the services to be provided. However, it was revealed that support should be proved both to refugee children and to PCG experts, especially in areas that are deemed as disadvantageous.

Psychological counseling is a profession. Professional staff should have a professional attitude while working with their clients (Turk PDR- DER 2006, 2021). PCG experts working with disadvantaged groups need to be more sensitive. This study revealed that PCG experts working with refugee children have a professional approach in general, in other words, they have an open, objective, empathetic, equal, and fair attitude towards their clients. On the other hand, although at a very low rate, some PCG experts may display an unprofessional attitude, such as being compassionate, sympathetic and cautious when working with refugee children. Considering that these attitudes may have a negative impact on refugee children's inability to properly unleash their potential rather than a contribution, the psychological counselling skills of PCG experts should be improved in order to reinforce their professional approach (Akşab and Türk 2022).

According to another finding of the study, while some refugee

children do not have any requests from the PCG service, most of them also demand academic and economic support, especially psychosocial and linguistic support. Simultaneously with these requests, the work of PCG experts for refugee children focuses on personal-social, educational and professional areas, and individual and group studies, family studies, and various project studies are carried out in these areas. Consistent with these results, according to Günlü et al.'s (2020) study, refugee request personal-social, educational and professional help in learning about language and communication skills, friendship relations, parent problems, adaptation problems, behavior problems, conflict resolution methods, higher education institutions, and Turkish education system. In parallel with these, PCG service provides support to refugee children in their interpersonal relations, adaptation to school and environment, educational success, safe and healthy life, personal guidance, social guidance, vocational guidance, preventive-developmental support services, seminars, group guidance, and training, individual psychological counseling and for elimination language and communication problems: Similarly, according to the study results of Akay et al. (2017), PCG services for refugee children offer communication, violence prevention, adaptation and orientation, acceptance, prevention of groupings and trauma studies. Especially considering that peer relations develop mutual understanding, sensitivity, and empathy between refugee and native children (Türk et al. 2018), psychosocial studies in this area are of critical importance. The fact that some of the refugee children do not have any requests from the PCG service is considered a crucial point in this study. Possible reasons for this situation should be deemed as refugees not being aware of the PCG service (Akay et al. 2017) and it should be ensured that all refugee children benefit from mental health services at school. This is important for the cultural, social, and psychological adaptation of refugee children. As a matter of fact, Ergün's (2022) compilation study on the adaptation of immigrant students to school concluded that studies should be carried out to increase positive contact in order to increase immigrant students' adaptation to school and society. In this sense, the school PCG service can be the pioneer of activities that increase positive experiences in order to improve the mental health of students.

The PCG experts who participated in the study stated that there are difficult and easy aspects of working with refugee children, and they used methods such as interpreter support, peer support, support from foundations/volunteers, cooperation with parents, giving responsibility, and being a model when coping with difficulties. They noted that when using assessment techniques for refugee children, they consider individual and cultural differences, adopt a culturally sensitive approach, try to explain adequately, clearly, and clearly, and receive interpreter support. The studies of Akay et al. (2017) on PCG experts working with refugee children revealed that they have difficulties due to language problems, lack of competence in trauma, and inability to communicate with parents while refugees faced the problem of lack of information about PCG service. As a way of coping with these difficulties, providing language training to

children and their families, having interpreters and Syrian PCG experts in schools, providing teachers with Arabic language training, providing psychosocial support to students, providing trauma training to PCG experts, providing financial assistance to refugees, providing information about Turkish culture, organizing social events, providing parent cooperation/visiting, organizing empathy activities, giving additional lessons, and creating their own schools come to the fore. Similarly, Günlü et al. (2020) identified communication, friendship relations, behavioral problems, parental problems, coping with grief, differences in the education system, and socioeconomic problems as difficult aspects of working with refugee children.

According to Akalın and Türküm (2021), PCG experts should be culturally sensitive and able to stretch the approach they adopt. This becomes even more important when many factors such as Turkey's location, ethnic and religious diversity, and ideological differences are considered. In addition, the recent intense wave of migration and the rapid social change make cultural differences more evident (Kağmıcı 2019). In this context, it was determined that PCG experts adopt a culture-sensitive approach, especially when using assessment techniques.

It was observed that working with refugee children contributes to the professional skills of PCG experts. PCG experts stated that they had the opportunity to develop themselves in areas such as non-language-based communication skills, trauma, loss and mourning, different cultures, education and examination system, different cases, and cultural sensitivity. In addition, they stated that they felt inadequate due to language and communication problems, lack of competence in post-traumatic stress disorder and professional dissatisfaction, and at this point, they needed training in areas such as non-language-based methods, trauma, EMDR, working with emotions, games, refugees' lifestyles and refugee rights. Similarly, Günlü et al. (2020) also determined that PCG experts who work with refugee children should have knowledge and skills in the fields of communication, being without prejudice/unconditional acceptance, immigration psychology, laws, regulations, rights and responsibilities, preparing a psychoeducational program, culturally sensitive psychological counseling, grief counseling, and post-traumatic stress disorder. It was determined that PCG experts need to improve their knowledge and skills, especially on culture and characteristics, post-traumatic stress disorder, and communication skills.

PCG experts' effective intervention proposals for refugee children can be grouped into personal-social, educational, and professional areas. Accordingly, studies can be intensified on issues such as counseling to families in the personal-social field, assertiveness, ability to live together, positive peer relations, understanding culture, informing refugees, games, drama, social skills, trauma/PTSD, and getting support from people who know the language and culture. Effective studies can be carried out on subjects such as language education/support in the educational field, informing about the education process, education in the classroom according to the level, improving belonging and harmony to the school, support of Arabic-

speaking personnel and on issues such as providing vocational information, presenting opportunities and employment of the family in the professional field. Similar suggestions emerged in the study by Akay et al. (2017). The findings of Topaloğlu and Çam Aktaş (2022) offered suggestions such as focusing on orientation and integration studies, conducting activities for the integration of refugee families, receiving support from different institutions and organizations for the studies to be carried out, inclusive education, integrating activities for refugees into the PCG program, cultural characteristics of refugees. It is seen that suggestions such as information about education, language education, academic support, psychosocial activities, trauma training.

Conclusion

As a result, it was observed in this research that PCG experts have a realistic perception of refugee children and can express advantages, disadvantages, and differences. It was noted that they carry out their work for refugee children in a professional manner in general, however, unprofessional attitudes such as showing compassion, sympathy, and acting cautiously can also be exhibited, albeit partially. It was determined that PCG experts carry out various activities according to the requests of refugee children and have some difficulties in this process, and they develop various coping methods in the face of these situations. The way of approach to the problems, areas of difficulty, support needs, and suggestions of PCG experts who have experience working with refugee children can increase the quality of the services to be provided in this direction. Finally, PCG experts offer various suggestions for effective intervention for refugee children based on their experiences.

It is necessary to evaluate the findings of this study by considering its limitations. First of all, it should be taken into account that the study was conducted with a qualitative method and the results obtained can only be transferred to groups with similar characteristics, and in this context, quantitative and mixed method studies can be carried out to obtain generalizable results. The high number of participants from the Istanbul and Mardin provinces in the study can be considered a limitation. Similar studies can be carried out by collecting data from the provinces with the highest number of refugees in Turkey. In this study, including only the experiences of PCG experts who have experience working with refugee children among mental health professionals can be expressed as another limitation. Research can be conducted with other mental health professionals (such as psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers) who have experience working with refugee children. It is noteworthy that some of the refugee children do not have any requests from the PCG service. Various studies can be conducted on the possible causes of this situation (such as stigma, not knowing who, where, and how to consult). When the research findings are considered, school counseling services can be the pioneer of work activities that increase positive experiences in order to improve the mental health of refugee children.

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