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Childhood Traumas and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation of Individuals Who Worked as Laborers in Their Childhood

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examined the childhood traumas and difficulties in emotional regulation of individuals who worked as workers in their childhood. **Materials and Methods:** The population of this descriptive study consists of individuals living in our country and working as workers in their childhood. The sample size was calculated using the A-priori Sample Size Calculator for the Multiple Regression program. The data of the study were collected via an online form using the "Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ-28)", "Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-Brief Form (DERS-16)" and "Introductory Characteristics Form" prepared by the researcher, Percentage, mean, correlation, standard deviation, ANOVA, Kruskal Wallis, T-test, Mann Whitney-u, and regression analyses were used to evaluate the data. **Results:** It was determined that the average CTQ-28 score of the participants was 42.00±12.87, and the average DERS-16 score was 38.47±13.89. It was determined that there was a low-level relationship between CTQ-28 and DERS-16 and that the CTQ-28 independent variable explained 18% of the total variance of the DERS-16 dependent variable ($R^2=0.182$). **Conclusion:** As the average childhood trauma score of individuals increases, difficulties in emotion regulation also increase.

Keywords: Child labor, Childhood trauma, Emotional regulation.

Çocukluklarında İşçi Olarak Çalışan Bireylerin Çocukluk Çağı Travmaları ve Duygu Düzenleme Güçlükleri

ÖZ

Amaç: Bu çalışma çocukluklarında işçi olarak çalışan bireylerin çocukluk çağı travmaları ve duygu düzenleme güçlüklerini incelemek amacıyla yapılmıştır. **Gereç ve Yöntem:** Tanımlayıcı türde yapılan bu çalışmanın evrenini ülkemizde yaşayan ve çocukluklarında işçi olarak çalışan bireyler oluşturmaktadır. A-priori Sample Size Calculator for Multiple Regresyon programı kullanılarak örneklem büyüklüğü hesaplanmıştır. Çalışmanın verileri "Çocukluk Çağı Ruhsal Travma Ölçeği (CTQ-28)", "Duygu Düzenleme Güçlüğü Ölçeği-Kısa Formu (DDGÖ-16)" ve araştırmacı tarafından hazırlanan "Tanıtıcı Özellikler Formu" kullanılarak online form aracılığı ile toplanmıştır. Verilerin değerlendirilmesinde yüzde, ortalama, korelasyon, standart sapma, ANOVA, Kruskal Wallis, T-test, Mann Whitney-u ve regresyon analizi kullanılmıştır. **Bulgular:** Katılımcıların CTQ-28 puan ortalamalarının 42.00±12.87, DDGÖ puan ortalamalarının ise 38.47±13.89 olduğu belirlenmiştir. CTQ-28 ile DDGÖ arasında düşük düzeyde bir ilişki olduğu ve CTQ-28 bağımsız değişkeninin, DDGÖ bağımlı değişkeninin toplam varyansının %18'ini açıkladığı tespit edilmiştir ($R^2=0.182$). **Sonuç:** Bireylerin çocukluk çağı travma puan ortalamaları arttıkça duygu düzenleme güçlükleri de artmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çocuk işçi, Çocukluk çağı travma, Duygu düzenleme.

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INTRODUCTION

When growth and development occur rapidly and care and protection are needed, childhood is the most critical phase of an individual's life (Çöpoğlu, 2018). Different definitions have been made regarding childhood based on the child's innocence and cognitive, sexual, and physical development. However, they all have a common goal to separate children from adults (Sağlam & Aral, 2016). It is an essential problem that children, who are different from adults in every aspect and perhaps more vulnerable than them, are employed as "child laborers" in jobs designed for adults. A study conducted in our country stated that children working as agricultural workers work an average of 10.33 hours per day, and 32.8% of them do not continue their education (Karadeniz et al., 2021). In the context of human rights and children's rights, it can be said that working children are deprived of their rights, such as healthy living, education, healthy life, and play.

Traumatic experiences such as neglect and abuse that individuals are exposed to before the age of 18, divorce of parents, loss of one or both parents, being separated from their parents for any reason, witnessing violence, migration, or experiencing a natural disaster are defined as childhood trauma (Karakaya et al., 2021). It can be mentioned that child labor, which is a type of economic abuse, can also cause trauma in children. It is known that childhood trauma is associated with depressive symptoms (Fan et al., 2023; Gürsoy & Mehmet, 2023), self-harming behaviors (Bakar Kahraman & Kizilay Çankaya, 2020), anxiety and stress (Gürsoy & Mehmet, 2023), and difficulties in emotional regulation (Alpay et al., 2017; Dereboy et al., 2018; Doba et al., 2022). Emotion regulation is "the internal and external processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying individuals' emotional responses to achieve their goals" (Thompson, 1994; Yiğit & Guzey Yiğit, 2019). It is known that traumatic events experienced in childhood cause emotional regulation difficulties (Gruhn & Compas, 2020). It is stated that people who have difficulties in emotional regulation have low levels of self-compassion and higher narcissistic characteristics (Aktaş & Şahin, 2018). For this reason, it is essential to identify situations that cause difficulty in emotional regulation and intervene early to support healthy personality development. When the literature was examined, no study was found examining childhood trauma and difficulties in emotion regulation of individuals who worked as workers during their childhood. This study was conducted to examine childhood trauma and difficulties in emotion regulation of individuals who worked as workers in their childhood.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study type

This study was conducted as a descriptive study to examine the childhood trauma and difficulties in emotion regulation of individuals who worked as workers in their childhood.

Population and sample of the study

The study data was collected between May 2022 and May 2023. The population of the study consists of individuals living in our country and working as workers in their childhood. The sample size was calculated using the A-priori Sample Size Calculator for the Multiple Regression program (alpha level .05, effect size 0.15, number of variables 11, and desired statistical power level 0.80), and it was determined that at least 122 people should be reached as a result of the calculation (Soper, 2023). The snowball sampling method, one of the non-probability sampling methods, was used to reach the individuals included in the study. The study was completed with the participation of 125 people who worked as workers in their childhoods.

Data collection tools

The data of the study were collected using the "Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ-28)", "Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-Brief Form (DERS-16)" and "Introductory Characteristics Form" prepared by the researcher. The data of the study was collected using an online survey form in order to reach more individuals. An attempt was made to reach people by sharing the link to the study on social media platforms (Instagram and WhatsApp) and using the snowball sampling method through people in the immediate vicinity.

Introductory Characteristics Form : It consists of 11 questions, including the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants.

Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ-28): The scale was developed by Bernstein and friends in 1994 to retrospectively evaluate abuse and neglect experiences before the age of 20. The Turkish validity and reliability study of the scale was conducted by Şar and friends in 2012. The 5-point Likert style scale, consisting of a total of 28 items, has 5 sub-dimensions (sexual, emotional, physical abuse, and physical, emotional neglect). High total scores on the scale are an indicator of childhood trauma. The scale score is calculated by reversing the scores obtained from the items of positive expressions. (Şar et al., 2012). Cronbach's alpha value, calculated as 0.93 in the original study, was calculated as 0.89 in this study.

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-Brief Form (DERS-16): The Turkish validity and reliability study of the scale developed by Bjureberg and friends was conducted by Yiğit and Yiğit in 2019. The 5-point Likert-type scale, consisting of 16 items, has 5 sub-dimensions (clarity, impulse, goals, non-acceptance, strategies). Although there are no reverse-scored items in the scale, difficulties in emotional regulation increase as the score received

from the scale increases. (Yiğit & Guzey Yiğit, 2019). Cronbach's alpha value, calculated as 0.92 in the original study, was calculated as 0.93 in this study.

Evaluation of data

The IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0 program evaluated the research data (IBM Corp. Released 2017. IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 25.0. Armonk, NY). Whether the data showed normal distribution was examined with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results. An Independent T-test was used to compare two customarily distributed groups, and an ANOVA test was used to compare more than two normally distributed groups. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare two groups that were not normally distributed, and the Kruskal-Wallis test was used to compare more than two groups that were not normally distributed. Correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationship between CTQ-28 and DERS-16. Linear regression analysis was used to examine the effect of CTQ-28 and DERS-16. The statistical significance level was accepted as $p < 0.05$.

Ethical considerations

The necessary ethics committee permission (Inonu University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics

Board, Decision Number: 2022/3381 Date: 12/04/2022) was obtained before starting the research. Voluntary consent was obtained from the participants in the form created online. Participants could participate in the study after ticking the checkbox below the information explaining the purpose of the study.

RESULTS

It was determined that the average age of participants was 33.39 ± 9.55 , the majority of them were male, they were married, they had a university and above education level, their income was equal to their expenses, they started working between the ages of 10-15, they grew up in a nuclear family, they had between 5 and 9 siblings, they had an oppressive-authoritarian, they worked because of financial difficulties, and the majority of them did not have difficulty controlling their emotions. (Table 1).

It was determined that the average CTQ-28 score was 42.00 ± 12.87 and the average DERS-16 score was 38.47 ± 13.89 (Table 2).

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics (n=125).

	n	%
The average age		33.39±9.55
Gender		
Woman	60	48.0
Man	65	52.0
Marital status		
Married	70	56.0
Single	55	44.0
Educational status		
High school and less	24	19.2
University and more	101	80.8
Income status		
Income is less than expenses	43	34.4
Income equals expenses	48	38.4
Income exceeds expenses	34	27.2
Age to start working		
Before age 10	36	28.8
10-15 years old	54	43.2
16-18 years old	35	28.0
The industry he worked in as a child		
Agriculture	41	32.8
Industry	21	16.8
Service	63	50.4
The type of family he/she grew up in		
Nuclear family	80	64.0
Extended family	45	36.0

Table 1. (continues) Sociodemographic characteristics (n=125).

	n	%
Number of siblings		
Between 0-4	27	21.6
Between 5-9	70	56.0
10 and above	28	22.4
Family attitude in childhood		
Oppressive-authoritarian	61	48.8
Overindulgent	10	8.0
Overprotective	14	11.2
Reassuring	40	32.0
Reason for working as a child		
I worked voluntarily	41	32.8
I worked with the pressure of my family	17	13.6
I worked due to financial difficulties	67	53.6
Status of difficulty in controlling emotions		
Yes	60	48.0
No	65	52.0

Table 2. CTQ-28 and DERS-16 score averages.

Scales	Mean±Sd	Median (Min-Max)
CTQ-28	42.00±12.87	(26.00-89.00)
DERS-16	38.47±13.89	(16.00-76.00)

Sd: Standard deviation, **Min:** Minimum, **Max:** Maximum

When the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants and their CTQ-28 score averages were compared, It was found that there was a relationship between CTQ-28 score averages and the age at which the participants started working as children, their family's attitude towards them in their childhood, their reasons for working as a child, status of difficulty in controlling their emotions. It has been determined that the mean CTQ-28 scores of individuals who started working before age 10, who have an oppressive-authoritarian family attitude, who work under the pressure of their families, and who have difficulty controlling their emotions are higher (Table 3).

When the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants and DERS-16 score averages are compared. It was determined that there was a relationship between the gender of the participants, their family's attitude towards them in childhood, their difficulty in controlling their emotions, and their difficulties in emotion regulation. It was determined that the average DERS-16 score of female individuals who had difficulty controlling their emotions was higher. In contrast, the average DERS-16 score of participants who grew up with a reassuring parental attitude was lower (Table 3).

The correlation analysis results determined a low-level relationship (Karagöz, 2019) between CTQ-28 and DERS-16 (Table 4).

In order to determine its effect on childhood trauma on difficulties in emotional regulation, a regression model was established and tested in which DERS-16 was determined as the dependent variable, and CTQ-28 was determined as the independent variable. The established model was found to be significant as a result of the regression analysis ($F=27.434$, $p \leq .000$). The CTQ-28 independent variable explains 18% of the total variance of the DERS-16 dependent variable ($R^2=0.182$) (Table 5).

Table 3. Sociodemographic characteristics and CTQ-28, and DERS-16.

	n	CTQ-28	DERS-16
		Mean±Sd	Mean±Sd
Gender			
Woman	60	42.58±13.26	41.11±15.21
Man	65	41.46±12.58	36.03±12.7
Test		t=0.485 p=0.629	t=4.966 p=0.042
Marital status			
Married	70	41.37±13.03	39.92±14.63
Single	55	42.80±12.74	36.61±12.80
Test		t=-0.614 p=0.540	U=1679.000 p=0.221
Age to start working			
Before age 10	36	47.91±15.99	41.02±14.14
10-15 years old	54	39.18±10.98	36.62±14.23
16-18 years old	35	40.25±10.02	38.68±13.05
Test		F=5.831 p=0.004	F=1.089 p=0.340
The type of family he/she grew up in			
Nuclear family	80	41.63±13.00	37.77±14.23
Extended family	45	42.64±12.77	39.71±13.35
Test		t=-0.418 p=0.677	U=1643.000 p=0.419
Number of siblings			
Between 0-4	27	37.88±10.03	36.85±14.72
Between 5-9	70	42.94±13.14	38.40±13.44
10 and above	28	43.60±14.17	40.21±14.52
Test		F=1.804 p=0.169	F=0.400 p=0.671
Family attitude in childhood			
Oppressive-authoritarian	61	48.90±14.08	42.34±13.81
Overindulgent	10	36.90±8.21	34.80±13.68
Overprotective	14	37.42±5.87	42.92±14.15
Reassuring	40	34.35±6.79	31.92±11.51
Test		F=15.840 p≤0.000	F=5.866 p≤0.001
Reason for working as a child			
I worked voluntarily	41	36.09±8.694	35.73±15.36
I worked with the pressure of my family	17	47.11±16.24	42.88±13.76
I worked due to financial difficulties	67	44.31±12.96	39.02±12.80
Test		F=7.427 p≤0.001	KW=4.487 p=0.106
Status of difficulty in controlling emotions			
Yes	60	46.93±13.54	44.98±13.66
No	65	37.44±10.40	32.46±11.20
Test		t=4.365 p≤0.000	t=0.095 p≤0.00

Sd: Standard deviation; t: Independent T-test; U: Mann-Whitney U test; F: ANO

Table 4. The relationship between CTQ-28 and DERS-16.

		DERS-16
CTQ-28	r	0.427
	p	0.000

Table 5. Effect of CTQ-28 on DERS-16.

	B	SE	β	t	p	R²
Constant	19.114	3.864		4.946	0.000	0.182
CTQ-28	0.461	0.088	0.427	5.238	0.000	
SE=12.619, F=27.434, p=0.000						

B: Unstandardized Coefficients Beta, **SE:** Standard Error, **β:** Standardized Beta, **F:** ANOVA, **R²:** R Square.

DISCUSSION

Freud said, “The foundations of our present personality lie in our childhood”. For this reason, we can say that the foundations of people's traumas and emotional regulation difficulties are laid in their childhood (Öztanrıöver & Bugay Sökmez, 2022). However, having to work during childhood, which has an essential place in shaping personality, may cause problems in mental, physical, and social areas both in childhood and adulthood. In this study, childhood trauma and emotional regulation difficulties of adults who worked as workers during their childhood were examined. It was determined that the average CTQ-28 score of the participants was 42.00 ± 12.87 , and the average DERS-16 score was 38.47 ± 13.89 . When the literature was examined, no study was found examining childhood trauma and difficulties in emotion regulation of individuals who worked as workers during their childhood. However, when the maximum and minimum scores obtained from the CTQ-28 and DERS-16 scales are examined (Şar et al., 2012; Yiğit & Guzey Yiğit, 2019), it can be said that the participants' childhood trauma and difficulties in emotion regulation are at an intermediate level.

Stressful events that children encounter while growing up can have long-term or permanent effects on their biopsychosocial development (Taşören, 2022). One of the critical stressors that can be encountered during childhood is having to work at a young age. In a study conducted in our country, when children working as agricultural workers were asked about their future expectations, 30% of them stated that they wanted to have a profession, 18% of them stated that they did not want to be oppressed, and did not want to be a worker, and 13.6% of them stated that they did not have any expectations. The same study stated that 32.8% of children did not continue their education life (Karadeniz et al., 2021). As can be understood from the study findings, working as a worker in childhood makes it difficult for children to continue their education and hinders their dreams of getting a good profession or not working as a worker. Alternatively, it causes them to lose their hopes for the future at a very young age. However, no study has been found showing the effects of working as a worker during childhood in adulthood. In this study, the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants who worked as workers in their childhood were compared with their CTQ-28 score averages. It was found that there was a relationship between CTQ-28 score averages and the age at which

the participants started working as children, their family's attitude towards them in their childhood, their reasons for working as a child, and status of difficulty in controlling their emotions. It has been determined that the mean CTQ-28 scores of individuals who started working before the age of 10, who have an oppressive-authoritarian family attitude, who work under the pressure of their families, and who have difficulty controlling their emotions are higher. Younger children will also have less ability to protect themselves. For this reason, it is thought that as the age of exposure to traumatic life events decreases, the adverse effects on the child will increase. In our study, this is thought to be the reason why childhood trauma is higher in individuals who had to work before the age of 10. In addition, parents' relationships with their children are thought to be critical in helping them cope with the traumatic events they experience. It has been determined that an authoritarian/oppressive parental attitude, in which there is a distant relationship between the parent and the child, excessive control over the child, and sometimes coercive punishments (Çoban et al., 2021), is associated with childhood trauma (Beşer et al., 2019). In this study, it was determined that childhood trauma was higher in individuals who worked under the pressure of their families. It is thought that this may be related to the oppressive parental attitude. Children who remain silent in the face of the events they experience and sometimes their parents' attitudes may also have difficulties expressing their emotions in the future. Studies have determined that there is a positive relationship between childhood trauma and difficulties in emotional regulation (Akpınar & Gümüş Demir, 2022; Özdamaca, 2023). In our study, it is thought that this is the reason why the average childhood trauma score of individuals who have difficulty controlling their emotions is higher. In addition, no study has been found in the literature examining the childhood trauma of individuals who worked as workers during their childhood. When studies on childhood trauma in different groups were examined, studies similar to our study results were found that stated that gender (Yüksel & Gökçearsan Çıfci, 2017; Aydın & Bal, 2022; Terzioğlu et al., 2023; Nia et al, 2023) and marital status (Terzioğlu et al., 2023) did not affect childhood trauma and that individuals who grew up in a family with a democratic family attitude had lower childhood trauma scores (Akarsu et al., 2022). In addition, contrary to our study findings, studies have also been found stating that

people whose marital status is married (Gürsoy & Mehmet, 2023; Mehmet & Gürsoy, 2023), who grew up in a family of relatives (Gürsoy & Mehmet, 2023), and whose gender is male have higher average trauma childhood scores.

Adverse life events experienced in childhood do not only remain in childhood but can also occur in the form of severe physical and psychological problems (Öztanrıöver & Bugay Sökmez, 2022). For this reason, studies examining the effects of working as a worker in childhood on adulthood are valuable. In this study, we compare the sociodemographic characteristics and emotional regulation difficulties of individuals who worked as workers in their childhood. When the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants and DERS-16 score averages are compared, it was determined that there was a relationship between the participants' gender, their family's attitude towards them in childhood, their difficulty in controlling their emotions, and their difficulties in emotion regulation. It was determined that the average DERS-16 score of female individuals who had difficulty controlling their emotions was higher. In contrast, the average DERS-16 score of participants who grew up with a reassuring parental attitude was lower. It is known that girls have better empathy skills (Abanoz et al., 2022). Girls with high empathy skills are thought to be more sensitive to the events around them. For this reason, it is thought that women who had to work as workers in their childhood have higher emotional regulation difficulties. One of the most critical factors affecting social and emotional development during childhood is parental attitudes because it is known that there is a relationship between the emotional attitudes and skills of the mother and the emotional attitudes and skills of the child. In addition, the emotional skills that individuals have are shaped by the reactions of parents to their children's behavior (Çalışkan Sarı & Şahin-Acar, 2018). It is thought that children who grow up with a reassuring parental attitude have less difficulty in regulating emotions.

According to the results of the analysis conducted to examine the relationship between childhood psychological trauma and difficulties in emotional regulation, it was determined that there was a low-level relationship between CTQ-28 and DERS-16. Additionally, CTQ-28 was determined to have an 18% effect on DERS-16. In Gümüş Demir's study with university students, it was determined that there was a positive relationship between CTQ-28 and DERS-16 (Akpınar & Gümüş Demir, 2022). A study using a scale that associated higher scores with better emotion regulation found that there was a negative relationship between emotion regulation and childhood trauma (Hébert et al., 2018). So, we can say that they reached a similar result to our study finding. In the study conducted by Dereboy and her friends, it is stated that, similar to our study finding, childhood trauma has a significant effect on difficulties in

emotional regulation and explains 18% of the total change (Dereboy et al., 2018).

CONCLUSION

Traumatic events experienced in childhood, when the foundations of personality are laid, may emerge as physiological or psychological problems in later periods. It is vital to examine the effects of child labor, which is considered a type of economic abuse, during adulthood. Our study, which examined the childhood traumas and emotion regulation difficulties of individuals who worked as workers in their childhood, determined that the participants' childhood traumas and emotion regulation difficulties were at a moderate level. It is recommended that the childhood traumas of individuals who worked as workers in their childhood be examined in larger sample groups.

Limitations of study

The fact that childhood trauma, which has psychiatric and cognitive dimensions, was evaluated only with the CTQ-28 scale, which is based on self-report, and the data was collected through an online survey are essential limitations of the study. Collecting data online may have resulted in the participants' high socioeconomic and educational levels. At the same time, since the CTQ-28 scale evaluates traumatic situations experienced during childhood, the possibility that people may have difficulty remembering is another study limitation. One of the critical limitations of the study is that, in addition to childhood trauma, the effects of other variables that may affect emotion regulation difficulties were not examined. At the same time, since this study is a cross-sectional study, the findings cannot be interpreted in a cause-effect relationship.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

Author Contributions

Plan, design: MY, SA; **Material, methods, and data collection:** MY, SA; **Data analysis and comments:** MY; **Writing and corrections:** MY.

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Ethical Approval

Institution: Inonu University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Board (Health Sciences Non-invasive Clinical Research Ethics Committee)

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