

# Toplum ve Sosyal Hizmet

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## The Relationship Between Social Workers' Intercultural Sensitivity and Awareness of Diversity and Oppression\*

**Sosyal Hizmet Uzmanlarının Kültüllerarası Duyarlılıklarını ile Çeşitlilik ve Baskı Farkındalıkları Arasındaki İlişki**

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### ABSTRACT

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*This study was conducted to investigate the level of intercultural sensitivity and awareness of diversity and oppression among 331 social workers who are members of the Turkish Association of Social Workers according to some variables and to determine the relationship between these constructs. The results show that the level of intercultural sensitivity and awareness of diversity and oppression among social workers differ according to the level of foreign language proficiency, the willingness to work with clients from different cultures, and the frequency of following the mass media of different countries. In addition, a moderate, positive, and significant relationship was found between social workers' intercultural sensitivity and their awareness of diversity and oppression.*

**Keywords:** Cultural competence, intercultural sensitivity, diversity, oppression, social worker

### ÖZ

*Bu çalışma, Sosyal Hizmet Uzmanları Derneği'ne üye olan 331 sosyal hizmet uzmanının kültüllerarası duyarlılık ile çeşitlilik ve baskı farkındalık düzeylerini bazı değişkenlere göre incelemek ve aralarındaki ilişkiyi belirlemek amacıyla gerçekleştirılmıştır. Sonuçlar, sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının kültüllerarası duyarlılık ile çeşitlilik ve baskı farkındalık düzeylerinin yabancı dil yeterlilik düzeyine, farklı kültürlerden müracaatçılara çalışma isteğine ve farklı ülkelerin kitle iletişim araçlarını takip etme sıklığına göre farklılaştığını göstermektedir. Ayrıca sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının kültüllerarası duyarlılıkları ile çeşitlilik ve baskı farkındıkları arasında orta düzeyde, pozitif ve anlamlı bir ilişki bulunmuştur.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kültürel yetkinlik, kültüllerarası duyarlılık, çeşitlilik, baskı, sosyal hizmet uzmanı

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## INTRODUCTION

Global and demographic changes in the last half century (Nadan, 2017) and increased migration movements due to globalization (Uzunaslan & Gökçearslan Çifci, 2019) caused social work to be practiced in a multicultural environment (İnak, 2023) and led social workers to have intercultural interactions with diverse clients (Freund & Band Winterstein, 2015). In today's global world, which includes diversity and pluralism (Akbaş, 2021), professionals who provide service to people need to be ready to interact with the increasingly diverse client system and to provide appropriate services (Arthur & Lalande, 2009). In this respect, it is important for social workers to gain intercultural communication competence (Akarçay Ulutaş et al., 2019) and to increase their knowledge and sensitivity about cultural differences (Anderson et al., 2006), diversity, and oppression (Sue et al., 2015). In fact, it is stated in the preface of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) 2021 Code of Ethics that "social workers are sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strive to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice" (NASW, 2023). In addition, when the NASW standards for cultural competence in social work practice are examined, it is seen that according to Standard 9, social workers should establish effective communication with clients from all cultural groups (Goode & Jones, 2009).

According to Hammer et al. (2003), cultural competence is related to intercultural sensitivity, which is a social and communicative ability (Tamam, 2010). Intercultural sensitivity is the ability to develop positive emotions to understand and value differences in communication (Bae & Song, 2017; Chen & Starosta, 1997). In other words, it means that an individual should value different cultures and be sensitive enough to understand cultural differences to display appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992). According to Chen and Starosta (1996), individuals will not reach intercultural awareness unless they recognize and respect cultural similarities and differences. Interculturally sensitive individuals tend to make an effort to listen to others carefully and understand them (Park, 2013). The relevant literature states that intercultural sensitivity reduces ethnocentrism (Chen, 2010; Delibaş et al., 2020; Öğüt, 2017) and facilitates respectful and polite communication with individuals (Miller, 2006). It is emphasized that high self-esteem (Agarwal, 2020; Dong et al., 2008), empathy (Demirel et al., 2020; Nganga, 2006; Yurttaş & Aras, 2020), and cultural intelligence (Abaslı & Polat, 2019; Aslan & Kızır, 2019) increase intercultural sensitivity. In addition, it is stated that knowledge and awareness of diversity or experiencing diversity are important in achieving intercultural competence and sensitivity (Beagan, 2015; Cai, 2016; Tétreault et al., 2021). Diversity refers to differences based on social categories such as ethnicity, class, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and political ideology (Bell, 2016). As social workers' understanding of diversity develops, they become aware of the impact of culture (Miller, 2006). Social workers who are not aware of diversity have difficulties in understanding their clients and providing them with an effective service (Duyan, 2010). Indeed, clients who are disadvantaged due to structural factors based on diversity are often vulnerable to oppression (Hancock et al., 2012).

According to Dominelli (2002), oppression is socially constructed through the actions of individuals and their behavior towards others. It would be wrong to consider oppression only at the level of interpersonal relations as the oppressor's cruel treatment of the oppressed by using force. This is because structural elements that are active in reproducing unequal relations also embed oppression in everyday life. Therefore, social workers need to understand oppression and the dynamics that produce it.

With mass and individual migrations, Türkiye has been characterized as a destination country rather than a transit country for migration since the 2000s (Kesgin, 2022). Statistics show that Türkiye is the country hosting the highest number of refugees in the world (UNHCR, 2023). According to the data of the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM), as of 2024, there are approximately 2.9 million Syrians under temporary protection in Türkiye (PMM, 2024c). Although, there are approximately 1 million regular immigrants with residence permits (PMM, 2024b) and approximately 225 thousand irregular immigrants (PMM, 2024a). The immigrants are made up of different disadvantaged (women, disabled, elderly, children, LGBTIQ) and ethnic (Kurdish, Turkmen, Alevi, Christian) groups and thus have diversity (Afyonoğlu, 2020). Due to these migration movements and the increasing multicultural social structure in Türkiye, individuals with different cultural backgrounds have become an important part of the client group of social workers (Göktuna Yaylacı & Sirkeci, 2019). For this reason, social workers need to have intercultural sensitivity and be aware of diversity and oppression in order to make effective interventions. With a comprehensive cross-cultural knowledge base, awareness of diversity and oppression, and sensitivity to differences, social workers can go beyond a superficial understanding of culturally diverse clients in practice.

Although there are studies investigating the intercultural sensitivities of social workers (Álvarez Pérez et al., 2014; Fernández Borrero et al., 2016; Gaitani et al., 2021) and social work students (Del Villar, 2010) in the international literature, studies in the field of social work in Türkiye have generally focused on cultural competence (Salduz Doruk & Artan, 2023; Şen Varan et al., 2022; Uzunaslan & Gökçearslan Çifci, 2022), respect for diversity (Korkmaz & Özbesler, 2022), discrimination and oppression (Arslan Özdemir & Duyan, 2018; Cankurtaran & Beydili, 2016; Kolay Çepni, 2024). This study is important as it aims to investigate the level of intercultural sensitivity and the level of awareness of diversity and oppression among social workers and to understand the impact of social workers' understanding of diversity and oppression on their display of intercultural sensitivity in communicating with individuals from different cultures. The findings may contribute to diversity-conscious multicultural practice and intercultural social work practice.

## **Research Questions**

1. Do the social workers' intercultural sensitivity and awareness of diversity and oppression levels differ according to gender, work experience, foreign language proficiency level, willingness to work with clients from different cultures, and frequency of following mass media of different countries?
2. Is there a significant relationship between social workers' intercultural sensitivity and awareness of diversity and oppression levels?

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This is a descriptive and relational study to determine the relationship between the intercultural sensitivity and the awareness of diversity and oppression of the social workers. Descriptive studies aim to identify and define the characteristics of a particular individual, event, or group within real-life contexts (Grove et al., 2013), whereas relational studies seek to examine the presence and/or strength of a relationship between two or more variables (Nahcivan, 2015).

### **Population and Sample**

The study population consisted of social workers who are members of the Turkish Association of Social Workers (TASW) and actively work in the field of social work. The TASW has 2300 members in total. Convenience and snowball sampling methods, which are among the non-probability sampling techniques, were used since the full list of social workers comprising the population could not be obtained. The convenience sampling was preferred due to its easy accessibility and availability at a given time (Etikan et al., 2015). Although it aimed to reach all members of the association, the final sample consisted of 331 social workers who were willing to participate in the research.

The data for the study were collected through Survey, an online survey platform. The survey link was distributed three times to participants via the TASW email group. Upon clicking the link, participants were first directed to a page containing the informed consent form, which detailed the purpose, nature, and expected duration of the study. Only those who read and agreed to the terms of the informed consent were granted access to the survey. Completing the survey took approximately 10 minutes. Data collection took place between March 2019 and January 2020.

### **Data Collection Tools**

#### ***Personal Information Form***

The form was prepared by the researchers in line with the literature. It includes questions regarding gender, length of service as a social worker, level of foreign language proficiency, willingness to work with clients from different cultures, and frequency of following the mass media of different countries.

### **Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS)**

The scale was developed by Chen and Starosta (2000) to measure the intercultural sensitivity levels of social workers. It was adapted to Turkish by Bulduk et al. (2011). It is a five-point Likert-type scale consisting of twenty-four items under five factors. Items 2, 4, 7, 9, 12, 15, 18, 20 and 22 are reverse-coded. The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 24, and the highest score is 120. A higher total score indicates a higher level of intercultural sensitivity. The Cronbach's alpha of the original scale is .72. In this study, it was calculated as .89.

### **Diversity and Oppression Scale (DOS)**

The scale was developed by Windsor et al. (2015) and adapted to Turkish by Demirdağ (2017). It is a five-point Likert-type scale consisting of twenty-two items under four factors. The DOS aims to measure participants' self-reports about diversity and oppression, based on the requirements of the Social Work Education Council (Windsor et al., 2015). Items 8, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18 are reverse-coded. The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 22, and the highest score is 110. A higher total score indicates a higher level of awareness of diversity and oppression. The Cronbach's alpha of the original scale is .82. It was found to be .80 in this study.

### **Statistical Analysis**

The data collected online were transferred to the IBM SPSS Statistics 20 program and analyzed. The total scores of the ISS and the DOS were analyzed. The normal distribution test was conducted to determine the analyses to be performed. Descriptive statistics, Independent Sample T Test, One-Way Analysis of Variance, and Pearson Correlation Analysis were performed in the study.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Research**

The study has some limitations. First, social workers who are members of Turkish Association of Social Workers and actively work in the field were included in the research sample. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to other social workers in Türkiye. Secondly, since the survey was administered online, social workers who could not use the Internet well could not be reached. In addition, the data were collected over a certain period of time and are based only on subjective reports of social workers. Despite these limitations, the study reveals the level of intercultural sensitivity and the level of awareness of diversity and oppression among social workers and shows that there is a relationship between intercultural sensitivity and diversity and oppression.

## **RESULTS**

65% of the participants are female. 69.5% worked for 55 months or less. 43.8% reported that they had intermediate level of foreign language knowledge. 93.1% stated that they wanted to work with clients from different cultures. It was found that 35% 'occasionally' followed the mass media of different countries (newspaper, magazine, radio, cinema, television, etc.) (Table 1).

**Table 1: Descriptive Characteristics of The Participants'**

Variables	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	215	65.0
Male	116	35.0
Work experience		
55 months and less	230	69.5
56 months and over	101	30.5
Foreign language proficiency level		
Very poor	22	6.6
Poor	105	31.7
Intermediate	145	43.8
Good	51	15.4
Very good	8	2.4
Willingness to work with clients from different cultures		
Yes	308	93.1
No	23	6.9
Frequency of following mass media of different countries		
Never	36	10.9
Rarely	115	34.7
Occasionally	116	35.0
Often	50	15.1
Always	14	4.2
Total	331	100.0

No statistically significant difference was found between the ISS and DOS scores of social workers according to gender and duration of work experience ( $p>.05$ ). Those with a 'very good' level of foreign language proficiency were found to have higher ISS scores than those with a 'poor' level of foreign language, while those with a 'good' level of foreign language proficiency were found to have higher DOS scores than those with a 'poor' and 'intermediate' level of foreign language ( $p<.05$ ). Among the social workers, those who reported that they wanted to work with clients from different cultures were found to have higher ISS scores ( $p<.05$ ). It was revealed that the participants who 'always' followed the mass media of different countries had higher ISS scores than those who 'never', 'rarely' or 'occasionally' followed the mass media of different countries. In addition, it was found that the participants who 'always' and 'often' followed the mass media of different countries had higher DOS scores than those who 'never', 'rarely' and 'occasionally' followed it ( $p<.05$ ; Table 2).

**Table 2: The T-Test and ANOVA Test Results Pertaining to the Participants' Total Scores in ISS and DOS**

Variables	ISS Total Score	DOS Total Score
		Mean $\pm$ SD
Gender		
Female	98.63 $\pm$ 9.62	80.61 $\pm$ 9.06
Male	97.11 $\pm$ 12.68	78.77 $\pm$ 10.74
	p=.261	p=.099
	t=1.128	t=1.655
Work experience		
55 months and less	97.70 $\pm$ 10.67	80.10 $\pm$ 9.24
56 months and over	99.00 $\pm$ 11.07	79.65 $\pm$ 10.74
	p=.316	p=.698
	t=-1.005	t=0.389
Foreign language proficiency level		
Very poor	98.00 $\pm$ 10.45	77.55 $\pm$ 10.59
Poor	97.27 $\pm$ 10.58	78.76 $\pm$ 8.89
Intermediate	97.13 $\pm$ 10.95	79.39 $\pm$ 9.84
Good	101.31 $\pm$ 9.92	83.78 $\pm$ 8.92
Very good	106.38 $\pm$ 12.49	88.63 $\pm$ 11.54
	p=.026	p=.001
	F=2.813	F=4.633
Willingness to work with clients from different cultures		
Yes	98.44 $\pm$ 10.81	80.15 $\pm$ 9.73
No	93.52 $\pm$ 9.75	77.57 $\pm$ 9.30
	p=.035	p=.219
	t=2.119	t=1.231
Frequency of following mass media of different countries		
Never	96.19 $\pm$ 9.77	76.56 $\pm$ 9.12
Rarely	97.57 $\pm$ 8.66	78.04 $\pm$ 8.81
Occasionally	96.94 $\pm$ 10.96	80.06 $\pm$ 9.08
Often	100.88 $\pm$ 13.09	84.50 $\pm$ 10.08
Always	107.00 $\pm$ 14.02	87.57 $\pm$ 13.03
	p=.003	p=.000
	F=4.032	F=7.690

Bold values indicates p&lt;.05.

The mean ISS score of the participants was  $98.10 \pm 10.80$ , and the mean DOS score was  $79.97 \pm 9.71$ . A moderate, positive and significant relationship ( $p < .01$ ) was found between the ISS and DOS scores. It was revealed that as intercultural sensitivity of social workers increased, their level of awareness of diversity and oppression also increased (Table 3).

**Table 3. Correlation Analysis Results Regarding the Relationship Between the Participants' ISS and DOS Scores.**

Scales	Mean $\pm$ SD	R	p
ISS	$98.10 \pm 10.80$		
DOS	$79.97 \pm 9.71$	.618	.000

Bold values indicates  $p < .01$ .

## DISCUSSION

This study was carried out to determine the intercultural sensitivity levels and the level of awareness of diversity and oppression among social workers who are the members of the Turkish Association of Social Workers, the factors affecting these levels, and the relationship between these constructs.

The study concluded that gender and duration of work experience did not influence the participants' intercultural sensitivity and their ability to recognize diversity and oppression. Sizoo et al. (2005) stated that especially intercultural sensitivity is affected by variables such as having been in a different country and knowing a foreign language, rather than variables such as age, gender, and race. Other studies have also reported no significant difference between the ISS total scores (Aktaş et al., 2021; Çifçi & Deger, 2021; Dönmez et al., 2023; Gönderen Çakmak et al., 2020; Hernandez Katz, 2014; Karasu et al., 2022) and DOS total scores (Kemp Graham, 2015; Stauss et al., 2018; Trull & Myers, 2020) in terms of these two variables.

Social workers with a high level of foreign language proficiency also had significantly higher ISS and DOS scores. In studies conducted with social workers working especially in the field of migration in Türkiye, the participants stated that they have had difficulties providing effective services due to language barriers (Paslı & Koç, 2022; Ulutaş & Attepe Özden, 2021) and they tried to overcome this problem by working with translators (Kaçaner, 2019); however, they complained about ineffective translation (Afyonoğlu & Harputlu, 2021), being misunderstood (Artan et al., 2018), and not being able to establish a bond of trust with the client (Cete & Kahraman Güloğlu, 2022). People gain

intercultural experience thanks to their language skills and can communicate effectively with people from different cultures (Repo et al., 2017). For this reason, it can be said that knowing a foreign language is a fundamental resource for recognizing diversity and understanding the context of different cultures. It helps understand and be sensitive towards different cultures. Butler and Molidor (1995) also argued that one method of showing sensitivity to clients from different cultural groups is knowing a foreign language. In addition, it has been revealed that learning a foreign language has a positive effect on being aware of and accepting diverse individuals (Colaço, 2017). Studies have shown that knowing a foreign language increases intercultural sensitivity (Chang et al., 2013; Kılıçlar & Pala, 2019; Oren & Yuceturk, 2021) and raises the perception of the connection between ethnic, gender, social class diversity and social justice issues (Kubota et al., 2003).

The study revealed that the intercultural sensitivity levels of the participants who were willing to work with clients from different cultures were high. An interculturally sensitive service involves integrating awareness of the client's cultural characteristics into practice. Different clients may require different services (Graham et al., 2010). In this context, it is important for social workers to have a positive attitude towards providing services to clients from different cultures and to be sensitive to different cultures. The literature also supports this finding (Dikmen et al., 2016; Gönenç et al., 2018).

It has been observed that following the mass media of different countries also affected the levels of intercultural sensitivity, and awareness of diversity and oppression. There are studies in the literature that support this finding. The studies conducted by Park (2013), Mao (2015), and Öğüt and Olkun (2018) revealed that the increase in the frequency of following the mass media increases the level of sensitivity. It can be said that following the mass media of different countries contributes to being aware of the existence of different cultures, different attitudes and behaviors, and different thoughts (Ulukaya-Öteleş, 2021). For this reason, an intercultural environment, which the participants experienced indirectly through the mass media, may have enabled the development of their sensitivity. In addition, today, people can experience diversity through mass media without leaving their own country or having to be somewhere else geographically (Liu, 2012). It is clear that the mass media has an effect on the formation or reinforcement of prejudiced attitudes and behaviors (Gürel, 2011) and may include content for many types of oppression such as violence, abuse, discrimination, and inequality against individuals. For this reason, it is an expected finding that social workers who follow mass media frequently have higher awareness of diversity and higher levels of ability to recognize discrimination and oppression.

The intercultural sensitivity levels of the participants were found to be high, and the levels of awareness of diversity and oppression were found to be moderate. Studies conducted with social workers and students reported high levels of ISS and DOS levels (Byers et al., 2020; Fernández

Borrero et al., 2016; Gaitani et al., 2021; Şaşmaz & Arslan, 2023; Schreiber & Minarik, 2018). There may be several underlying reasons for the relatively low levels of awareness and understanding of diversity and oppression among participants in this study. First, the Education Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) emphasize that social work education programmes should integrate issues of diversity into the curriculum and equip students with the necessary competencies to challenge systemic oppression (CSWE, 2022). However, in many social work departments in Türkiye, topics such as anti-oppressive practice, cultural competence, and diversity education are often offered only as elective courses or are addressed within a limited number of instructional hours. Furthermore, the provision of social services sometimes overlooks the presence of diverse identities, belief systems, lifestyles, and ethnic groups. This institutional invisibility can significantly diminish social workers' awareness of and responsiveness to diversity in practice. In this study, the majority of the participants had less than five years of experience, which may have contributed to their lower levels of awareness and understanding of diversity and oppression.

The relationship between the participants' ISS and DOS scores was moderate, positive and significant. As the awareness of diversity and oppression increased, participants' intercultural sensitivity also increased. Banks (2018) found a moderate, positive and significant relationship between intercultural sensitivity, attitudes toward diversity, and intercultural awareness. This finding suggests that intercultural sensitivity increases as the level of awareness of diversity and different cultures increases. Strekalova (2012) conducted a study with teachers teaching refugee students and found that the teachers with high intercultural sensitivity scores were aware of diversity. On the other hand, the participants with low intercultural sensitivity scores stated that they did not know about diversity until they started working with refugees, and that they had difficulty with the behaviors of students from different cultures. Fernández Borrero et al. (2016) found that social workers trained about diversity have more respect for differences and higher self-confidence. They explained that receiving education about diversity provides a background on intercultural knowledge and is a distinguishing factor in communicating with different cultures with acceptance and respect.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings showed that social workers who knew a foreign language well, who were willing to work with clients from different cultures and who followed the mass media had higher levels of intercultural sensitivity and awareness of diversity and oppression. It was also found that as the level of awareness of diversity and oppression increased, intercultural sensitivity also increased.

Developing intercultural sensitivity and fostering awareness of diversity and oppression require individuals to critically examine the assumption that their cultural perspective is inherently normative

or superior. In this regard, experiential learning methods—such as psychodrama and structured group work—can be employed to facilitate self-reflection among social workers, enabling them to identify their own biases and understand how these may affect client relationships and the overall quality of service provision. Furthermore, in-service training activities can be implemented to enhance social workers' intercultural sensitivity and their awareness of diversity and oppression in professional practice.

The reciprocal relationship between culture and language is undeniable. In a multicultural society, social workers need to develop their foreign language proficiency in order to better understand the cultures of clients from different countries. Considering the effect of following the mass media on intercultural sensitivity and awareness of diversity and oppression, it is recommended that social workers follow the current developments in the world and increase their ability to use technology in order to provide an effective intercultural service. In order to educate social workers who are culturally sensitive and respectful of differences, the curriculum should incorporate courses designed to enhance applicants' sensitivity to diversity and pluralism, both in their attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, courses on multicultural social work, intercultural sensitivity, and anti-oppressive social work can be included in the social work education curriculum.

The results of the research show that social workers have high intercultural sensitivity scores and recognize and value differences when they communicate with individuals from different cultures. Future qualitative studies can investigate how social workers adapt to differences. Since communication is a reciprocal process, the intercultural sensitivity levels of the clients that social workers serve can also be investigated. Empirical studies may be undertaken to assess the effectiveness of training interventions aimed at enhancing social workers' intercultural sensitivity and increasing their awareness of diversity and oppression. Finally, in societies that are becoming increasingly multicultural, the importance of intercultural sensitivity, diversity and oppression will increase day by day. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct more research on this subject.

## **ETHICAL INFORMATION ON RESEARCH**

Before the study, ethical approval (2018/177) was obtained from the Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee of XX University. In addition, permission was obtained from the TASW to conduct the study. In the web survey, the participants were informed about the research process (informed consent), and they were ensured that participation in the study is voluntary (principle of voluntariness) and that their personal information would be kept confidential (confidentiality principle).

## **CONTRIBUTION OF RESEARCHERS**

The authors contributed equally to the research.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

In this study, there are no potential conflicts of interest.

## GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Son yarımda yaşanan küresel ve demografik değişimler ile küreselleşmenin etkisiyle artan göç hareketleri, sosyal hizmet uygulamasının çok kültürlü bir ortamda gerçekleşmesine ve sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının çeşitlilik gösteren müracaatçılarla kültürlerarası etkileşimler yaşamalarına zemin hazırlamıştır. Farklılığı ve coğululuğu ihtiyaç eden günümüz küresel dünyasında, insana hizmet veren profesyonellerin, giderek çeşitli hale gelen müracaatçı sistemi ile etkileşime girmeye ve onlara uygun hizmet sunmaya hazır olmaları gerekmektedir. Bu doğrultuda, sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının kültürlerarası iletişim yetkinliği kazanmaları, kültürel farklılıklara, çeşitliliğe ve baskiya dair bilgilerini ve duyarlılıklarını artırmaları önemlidir. Nitekim Ulusal Sosyal Hizmet Uzmanları Derneği 2021 yılı Etik Kurallarının önsözünde de “sosyal hizmet uzmanları kültürel ve etnik çeşitliliğe duyarlıdır ve ayrımcılık, baskı, yoksulluk ve diğer sosyal adaletsizlik biçimlerini sona erdirmek için çaba gösterirler” denmektedir. Ayrıca sosyal hizmet uygulamasında kültürel yetkinlik için Ulusal Sosyal Hizmet Uzmanları Derneği standartlarına bakıldığından, Standart 9'da sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının tüm kültürel gruplardan müracaatçılarla etkili iletişim sağlamaları gereği vurgulanmaktadır.

Kıtlesel ve bireysel göçlerle beraber 2000'lerden itibaren Türkiye göç için transit ülkeden ziyade hedef ülke olarak nitelendirilmeye başlamıştır. İstatistikler, dünyada en fazla mülteciye ev sahipliği yapan ülkenin Türkiye olduğunu göstermektedir. Türkiye'de yaşanan bu göç hareketleri ve artan çok kültürlü toplumsal yapı nedeniyle farklı kültürel geçmişe sahip bireyler müracaatçı grubunun önemli bir parçası haline gelmiştir. Bu nedenle sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının etkili bir müdahalede bulunmak için kültürlerarası duyarlılığa, çeşitlilik ve baskı bilincine sahip olmaları gerekmektedir. Kültürlерarası duyarlılık, iletişimde farklılıklarını anlamaya ve değer vermeye yönelik olumlu duyguları geliştirme yeteneğini ifade etmektedir. Kültürlерarası duyarlı bireyler başlarını dikkatli bir şekilde dinlemek ve anlamak için çaba gösterme eğilimindedirler. İlgili literatürde, kültürlerarası duyarlılığın etnik merkezciliği azallığı; bireylerle saygılı ve kibar iletişim kurmayı kolaylaştırdığı; benlik saygısının, empatinin ve kültürel zekanın yüksek olmasının ise kültürlerarası duyarlılığı artırdığı vurgulanmaktadır. Bunun yanında çeşitliliğe yönelik bilgi ve farkındalıkın veya çeşitliliği deneyimlemenin kültürlerarası yetkinliğe ve duyarlılığa ulaşmada önemli olduğu belirtilmektedir. Zira sosyal hizmet uzmanının çeşitlilik anlayışı gelişikçe, kültürün etkisinin de farkına varmaktadır.

Çeşitlilik bilincine sahip olmayan sosyal hizmet uzmanları ise müracaatçılarını anlamada ve onlara etkili bir hizmet sunmada güçlük çekmektedirler.

Uluslararası literatürde sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının ve öğrencilerinin kültürlerarası duyarlılıklarını araştıran çalışmalar olsa da Türkiye'de sosyal hizmet alanındaki çalışmaların genellikle kültürel yetkinliğe, farklılığa saygıya, ayrımcılık ve baskiya odaklandığı görülmektedir. Bu araştırma, sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının kültürlerarası duyarlılık ile çeşitlilik ve baskı düzeylerini belirleme, çeşitlilik ve baskıyı tanımlarının farklı kültürden bireylerle iletişimde kültürlerarası duyarlılık sergilemelerine etkisini anlama bakımından önemlidir. Araştırmanın amacı, sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının kültürlerarası duyarlılık ile çeşitlilik ve baskı düzeylerini bazı değişkenlere göre incelemek ve aralarındaki ilişkiyi belirlemektir. Çalışmadan elde edilecek sonuçların, çeşitlilik bilincine sahip çok kültürlü uygulamaya ve kültürlerarası sosyal hizmet uygulamasına katkıda bulunacağı düşünülmektedir.

Bu çalışma, sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının kültürlerarası duyarlılıkları ile çeşitlilik ve baskı farkındalıkları arasındaki ilişkiyi belirlemeye yönelik betimsel ve ilişkisel bir araştırmadır. Çalışmanın evreni, Sosyal Hizmet Uzmanları Derneği'ne üye olan ve sosyal hizmet alanında aktif olarak çalışan sosyal hizmet uzmanlarından oluşmaktadır. Araştırmada evreni oluşturan sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının tam listesine ulaşılmadığı için olasılığa dayalı olmayan örnekleme tekniklerinden kolayda örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Çalışma grubuyla temas kurma sürecinde Sosyal Hizmet Uzmanları Derneği e-posta grubundan destek alınmıştır. Nihai örneklem, araştırmaya katılmaya gönüllü olan 331 sosyal hizmet uzmanından oluşmuştur. Çalışmada katılımcıların sosyo-demografik, mesleki ve kültürel özelliklerini belirlemek için araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen "Kişisel Bilgi Formu", kültürlerarası duyarlılık düzeyini ölçmek için "Kültürlerarası Duyarlılık Ölçeği (KDÖ)", çeşitlilik ve baskı düzeyini ölçmek için "Çeşitlilik ve Sosyal Adalet Ölçeği (ÇSAÖ)" kullanılmıştır. Araştırma verileri web tabanlı anket sistemi olan <http://www.surveey.com> kullanılarak toplanmıştır. İlgili site aracılığıyla oluşturulan anket linki katılımcıların e-posta adreslerine gönderilmiştir. Araştırma verilerinin analizinde tanımlayıcı istatistikler, Bağımsız Örneklem T Testi, Tek Yönlü Varyans Analizi ve Pearson Korelasyon Analizi kullanılmıştır. İstatistiksel analizler KDÖ ve ÇSAÖ toplam puanları üzerinden yapılmıştır.

Araştırmadan elde edilen bulgulara göre, sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının %65'inin kadın olduğu ve %69.5'inin 55 ay ve altı süredir görev yaptığı, %43.8'inin orta düzeyde yabancı dil bilgisinin olduğu, %93.1'inin farklı kültürden müracaatçılarla çalışmak istediği, %35'inin farklı ülkelerin kitle iletişim araçlarını (gazete, dergi, radyo, sinema, televizyon vb.) 'ara sıra' takip ettiği belirlenmiştir. Sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının kültürlerarası duyarlılık düzeylerinin yüksek, çeşitlilik ve baskı düzeylerinin orta olduğu görülmüştür. Katılımcıların kültürlerarası duyarlılığa sahip olmalarında ve çeşitlilik ve baskıyı tanıma yeterliliklerinde cinsiyetin ve görev süresinin belirleyici bir etmen etmediği sonucuna

ulaşılmıştır. Yabancı dil bilme düzeyi 'çok iyi' olanların 'kötü' olanlara göre KDÖ puanları daha yüksek bulunurken, yabancı dil bilme düzeyi 'iyi' olanların 'kötü' ve 'orta' olanlara göre CSAÖ puanları daha yüksek bulunmuştur. Farklı kültürden müracaatçıyla çalışmaya istekli olan katılımcıların kültürlerarası duyarlılık düzeyleri yüksek bulunmuştur. Farklı ülkelerin kitle iletişim araçlarını 'her zaman' takip eden katılımcıların 'hiçbir zaman' takip etmeyen, 'nadiren' ve 'ara sıra' takip edenlere göre KDÖ puanlarının daha yüksek olduğu; kitle iletişim araçlarını 'her zaman' ve 'çoğu zaman' takip eden katılımcıların 'hiçbir zaman' takip etmeyen, 'nadiren' ve 'ara sıra' takip edenlere göre CSAÖ puanlarının daha yüksek olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Katılımcıların KDÖ ve CSAÖ puanları arasındaki ilişkiye bakıldığından orta düzeyde, pozitif ve anlamlı bir ilişkinin olduğu görülmüştür.

Sonuç olarak, yabancı dili iyi düzeyde bilen, farklı kültürden müracaatçılarla çalışmak isteyen, kitle iletişim araçlarını takip eden sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının daha yüksek kültürlerarası duyarlılık ile çeşitlilik ve baskı yeterliliğine sahip oldukları görülmüştür. Diğer yandan çeşitlilik ve baskı düzeyi arttıkça kültürlerarası duyarlılığın da arttığı belirlenmiştir. Yalnızca Sosyal Hizmet Uzmanları Derneği'ne üye olan ve alanda aktif olarak çalışan sosyal hizmet uzmanlarıyla araştırmanın yürütülmesi çalışmanın sınırlılıklarındanandır. Bununla birlikte, anketler web tabanlı anket sitesi aracılığıyla uygulandığından interneti yeterli düzeyde kullanamayan sosyal hizmet uzmanlarına ulaşlamamıştır. Ayrıca veriler belirli bir zaman aralığında toplanmıştır ve yalnızca sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının öznel bildirimlerine dayanmaktadır.

Kültür ve dil arasındaki karşılıklı ilişki yadsınamaz. Çok kültürlü bir toplumda özellikle farklı ülkelerden müracaatçıların kültürlerini daha iyi anlayabilmek için sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının yabancı dil yeterliliklerini geliştirmesi gerekmektedir. Kitle iletişim araçlarını takip etmenin kültürlerarası duyarlılığa ve çeşitlilik ve baskı bilincine etkisini de göz önünde bulundurarak sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının kültürlerarası etkili bir hizmet sunmak adına dünyadaki güncel gelişmeleri takip etmeleri, teknolojiyi kullanma becerisini artırmaları önerilmektedir.

Araştırma sonuçları sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının kültürlerarası duyarlılık puanlarının yüksek olduğunu, farklı kültürden bireylerle iletişime geçiklerinde farklılıklarını ve değer verdiklerini göstermektedir. Gelecekteki çalışmalarda, uzmanların farklılıklarla karşılaşıklarında nasıl uyum sağladıklarını araştırmak üzere nitel araştırmalar gerçekleştirilebilir. İletişim çift yönlü bir süreç olduğu için sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının hizmet sunduğu müracaatçıların da kültürlerarası duyarlılıkları araştırılabilir. Son olarak giderek çok kültürlü hale gelen toplumlarda kültürlerarası duyarlılık ile çeşitlilik ve baskının önemi de gün geçtikçe artacaktır. Bu nedenle bu konuda daha fazla araştırmanın yapılması önerilmektedir.

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