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## **Attitudes of Social Care Professionals towards Children in Turkey**

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This study assesses the attitudes of 215 social care professionals employed in the child protection services in Turkey towards children. The study concludes that female social care professionals, who are at the age of 41 and above, have a more favourable attitude towards children. This finding is reflected in the scores attained for the different variables, which vary significantly.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The family plays a significant role in the development of children. The state provides a variety of services and undertakes this role in the case of a child who is deprived of the care of a family. Although these services vary from country to country, preventive maintenance (of nurseries, orphanages, 'house of love', and house of children), fostering and adoption are the most widespread services in Turkey. In addition, Children and Youth Centers (CYC) also provide services for children living or working on the streets.

The Turkish Association for Protection of Children was founded after the end of three consecutive wars—the Balkan War, the First World War and the Turkish war of independence—to help the martyrs' children. This association was also founded on the child welfare reforms framed by Atatürk. The most comprehensive law for the protection of children was enacted in 1949. The responsibility for the care and protection of children was given to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health by

an act of law. The Social Services and Child Protection Institution was founded in 1982 by an act of law numbered as 2828. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was signed by Turkey in 1990. Subsequently, the Social Services and Child Protection Institution was replaced by the Directorate of General Children's Services under the Ministry of Family and Social Policy.

Children who need protection in Turkey fall within the scope of 'protective care services' in the relevant boarding institutions established by the Ministry of Family and Social Policy, General Directorate Child and Youth Services. As per the Social Services and Child Protection Institution law numbered 2828, 'Children in Need of Protection' is defined as the physical, mental and moral development or personal safety of a child:

1. who is an orphan;
2. whose mother or father or both are unknown;
3. who has been abandoned by the mother, father or both; and
4. who has been neglected by the mother or father and left vulnerable to a wide range of social dangers and harmful habits such as prostitution, begging, alcohol and substance abuse, and bereft of guidance.

Based on the investigation report prepared by social workers, children between 0–12 years are placed in nurseries, while those between 13–18 years are placed in orphanages. The staff comprise nursemaids and child trainers; while professional help constitutes social workers, child development specialists, psychologists and teachers. Some of the nursemaids employed in these institutions are not permanent employees. Generally, staff working for government institutions are permanent employees. The care and cleaning staff are graduates of child development departments of high schools. The care staff work in three shifts. Barring the foster-mother, none of the other staff are assessed for suitability/compatibility for working with children.

The attitudes of the caregivers and other professional help towards children are crucial to their development. Many studies have indicated that poor preventive maintenance is detrimental to the healthy growth of children in the early childhood period. Institutions with poor physical infrastructure and an inefficient and incompetent staff can leave a lasting negative impact on children, especially, on those who spend the first years of their life there (Bowlby, 1951; Ainsworth 1979; Güçray, 1989; Erkan, 1995; Groze and Ileana, 1996; Ames and others, 1997; Rutter and Kreppner, 1998; O'Connor and Brendenkamp, 1999; Hatemi and others,

2000; Gökçearsan, 2003). The studies conducted by Bowlby (1951) reveal that the need for love is one of the most crucial factors necessary for a child's development. Moreover, it has been determined that for the development of a baby, the role of a caregiver is more important than the condition of the physical environment. The Emotional Quotient of the caregivers contribute to the emotional development of babies, thus facilitating learning. Emotional motivation can also help the development of the brain (Greenspan and Shanker, 2004; Tronick, 2006). Erkan (1995) concludes that children who get more care from their caregivers in the institutions have higher levels of self-esteem than children who do not get enough care.

There are limited studies available on the healthy development of children and the physical conditions of the institutions (Vashchenko, Easterbrooks and Miller, 2010). Many personnel employed in these institutions have only completed formal education and are not trained in child care (St. Petersburg–USA Orphanage Research Team, 2008; Rosas and McCall, 2009). There are a few studies undertaken where the behaviours of caregivers—psychological situation, job satisfaction, attitudes toward children, knowledge about care giving, work stress, coping ability and support, anxiety and depression issues are discussed (Orphanage Research Team, 2009).

Caregivers play an important role in the psycho-social and physical development of children. However, there is a wide gap in existing literature on caregiver-children relationship and the characteristics of caregivers. Groark, McCall and Fish (2011) investigated the conditions of three orphanages in the USA. The study determined that caregivers did not give enough support to children by way of empathy or counselling.

The data gathered from a multiple choice survey carried out by Vashchenko and others (2010) on the quality and the attitude of the caregivers determined that 54 percent of the caregivers defined their relationship with children as professional. While 47 percent defined their relationship with children as warm, about 45 percent described their relationship similar to that between a mother and her child. Majority of the respondents (41 percent) were working because of the income and benefits accrued. Spiritual and moral considerations for working with children accounted for 39 percent of the responses; 37 percent of the respondents reported that they were working as caregivers because they loved to work with children; and 30 percent reported that they were compelled to work in these institutions because of certain life situations.

One of the main aims of social work is to increase the self sufficiency of individuals. When families are unable to take care of their children, social workers are required to guide them with alternative coping strategies. It is, therefore, important to ensure that caregivers employed by institutions are adequately trained in childcare and are also fond of children.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The main aim of this study is to investigate the socio-demographic characteristics and the attitudes of professionals employed in child protection services under the Social Services and Child Protection Agency in Turkey. These include social service specialists, psychiatrists, teachers, child development specialists, child educators and caregivers.

Questions related with the sub goals of the study are:

1. Do scores of caregivers on the Barnett Liking of Children Scale (BLOCS) vary according to their socio-demographic characteristics (sex, age, marital status and presence of children)?
2. Do scores of caregivers on the BLOCS vary according to their working environment (institution, seniority, length of service, change in the institution, and the number of children)?
3. Do scores of caregivers on the BLOCS vary according to involvement in the activities related with children (reading children's books, following news about children, knowledge about children's games, volunteering for activities in institutions)?

## **BARNETT LIKING OF CHILDREN SCALE**

The Barnett Liking of Children Scale is an instrument developed by Barnett and Sinisiin in 1990 to analyse the attitudes of people towards children. It has been tested in terms of validity and reliability in Turkish conditions by Duyan and Gelbal (2008). In this study, test-retest reliability and the internal consistency coefficient have been determined as 0.85 and 0.92 respectively. According to Fischer and Corcoran (1994), a scale is a reliable and valid instrument to use for analysis of people's attitude towards children since internal consistency and test-retest reliability of BLOCS has been determined as 0.93 and 0.91 respectively. The scale consists of 14 items and participants are expected to select one of the seven options ranging from 'I completely disagree' to 'I completely agree' for each of the items. Four items related with the state of liking of children are unfavorable (3rd, 6th, 10th and 13th items) and 10 of them are favorable.

When favourable items are scored, the option of 'I completely agree' is scored as '7' and the item of 'I completely disagree' is scored as '1'. When unfavorable items are scored, the option of 'I completely disagree' is scored as '7' and the item of 'I completely agree' is scored as '1'. If one gets a higher score, this means that he/she has a favourable attitude towards children; and if the reverse is the case, his/her attitude towards children is categorised as more unfavourable.

### **Statistical Analysis**

Parametric or non-parametric statistical methods appropriate to the structure and qualities of the variables were utilised. Scores on BLOCS is regarded as the dependent variable of the research. A dependent variable is assumed to have a normal distribution. Independent variables include work and involvement in activities with children.

When the independent variable is classified in two categories and 't' test is applied; and when the independent variable is classified in more than two categories 'F' test is applied. The level of statistical significance is determined as 0.05.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Questionnaire**

A questionnaire based on the Turkish version of the Barnett Liking of Children Scale has been applied in this study. The average time taken to complete the questionnaire was twenty minutes.

The first section of the questionnaire is concerned with the socio-demographic characteristics (sex, age, marital status, presence of children).

The second section includes questions related to working conditions (institution, status, length of service, change of institutions worked in and the number of children attended to in one workday).

The last section seeks information on the activities undertaken by the caregivers (reading books on children, following news about children, knowledge about children's games, getting involved in the voluntary activities of institutions working with children).

### **Sample of the Study**

The provinces of Ankara, İzmir and İstanbul were selected for the study as they are the most populated and offer a diverse range of services.

The sample covered 215 respondents from a total of 455 professionals working in nurseries, orphanages, and or CYCs.

## FINDINGS

The findings of this study are analysed in three sections: socio-demographic characteristics; some qualities regarding work life; and activities related with children.

The following table (Table 1) shows the socio-demographic variables of caregivers. The scores are analysed using the BLOCS scale.

**TABLE 1: Socio-demographic Variables of Caregivers**

<i>Characteristics of the Sample</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>Statistics</i>
<b>Sex</b>				
Female	142	87.87	12.35	t = 2.887*
Male	73	82.66	12.86	
<b>Age</b>				
20-25	38	87.61	10.12	F = 0.826
26-30	50	84.16	18.14	
31-35	28	85.25	10.47	
36-40	44	85.14	13.36	
41+	55	88.02	08.22	
<b>Marital status</b>				
Married	130	85.71	12.25	F = 0.250
Single	71	86.42	14.32	
Divorced	14	88.07	08.45	
<b>Have a child/children</b>				
Yes	109	86.22	12.04	t= 0.644
No	34	84.71	11.72	

\* p < 0.01

There is a significant difference between female (n=142; X=87.87) and male (n=73; X=82.66) members of the profession with respect to the scores on BLOCS (t=2.887; p < 0.01).

Members of the profession at the age of 41 and above have the highest score on BLOCS (n=55; X=88.02). The lowest score in this respect is obtained for caregivers between the ages of 26-30 years. Divorced members of the profession have the highest score on BLOCS (n=14; X=88.07).

There is no significant difference between members of the profession who have children (n=109; X = 86.22) and those who do not have (n= 34; X = 84.71).

**TABLE 2: Variables Related to the Working Environment**

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SS</i>	
<b>Institution</b>				
Nursery	63	86.06	14.64	F = 0.106
Orphanage	107	86.42	12.55	
CYC-Children and Youth Centre	45	85.38	10.36	
<b>Position</b>				
Social Service Specialist	47	87.09	7.13	F = 1.239
Child Development Specialist	22	86.32	13.62	
Child Educator	31	87.74	18.41	
Teacher	70	83.77	14.40	
Psychiatrist	22	84.36	9.01	
Caregiver	23	90.39	7.76	
<b>Length of the service (year)</b>				
First Year	45	87.67	13.61	F = 3.665*
1-5	97	83.56	14.82	
6 +	73	88.51	7.76	
<b>Change of work place/institution</b>				
0	44	87.18	9.34	F = 1.024
1	55	86.93	9.81	
2	46	88.17	10.00	
3	24	82.50	18.81	
4	25	83.60	19.67	
5	21	84.19	12.31	
<b>The number of children attended to in one working day</b>				
1-5	10	79.90	18.60	F = 1.026
6-10	96	86.55	11.96	
11-15	30	85.23	16.26	
16-20	31	88.71	14.13	
21+	48	85.33	8.89	
<b>Willingness to change the job</b>				
Willing to	96	81.77	12.86	t = - 4.526**
Not willing to	113	89.51	11.85	

\* p < 0.05

\*\* p < 0.001

The above table (Table 2) presents data on the working environment. Variables include the type of institution, seniority, length of service, change in job/institution, number of the children attended to in one working day, and any inclination to quit the present job. With respect to the type of the institution, no significant difference has been determined between the members of the profession employed in the nursery, orphanage and CYC ( $F=0.106$ ).

With regard to the work position, caregivers are found to have the highest score on BLOCS ( $n=23$ ,  $X=90.39$ ), followed by child educators ( $n=31$ ,  $X=87.74$ ), social service specialists ( $n=47$ ,  $X=87.09$ ), and child development specialists ( $n=22$ ,  $X=86.32$ ).

Significant difference among members of the profession was found in the duration of service ( $F=3.665$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The ones who have been working for six to ten years ( $n=73$ ,  $X=88.51$ ) have higher scores on BLOCS. With respect to change of institution, scores on BLOCS do not vary significantly ( $F=1.024$ ,  $p>0.01$ ). Members of the profession who have never changed their places of work ( $n=23$ ,  $X=90.39$ ) have higher scores than those who have changed their institutions ( $n=44$ ,  $X=87.18$ ); while those who have changed their places of work more than three times have lower scores on BLOCS ( $n=24$ ,  $X=82.50$ ).

Scores on BLOCS do not vary according to the number of the children attended to in one working day ( $F=1.026$ ,  $p>0.01$ ). However, members of the profession who have attended to 16-20 children have higher scores on BLOCS ( $n=31$ ,  $X=88.71$ ).

There is a significant difference between those who are inclined to quit the job and those who are not ( $t=4.526$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Those who are not inclined to quit their job got higher scores on BLOCS ( $n=113$ ,  $X=89.51$ ).

The scores for variables related to activities conducted with children are shown in Table 3. These include reading books to children, following news about children, having sufficient knowledge about children's games, and doing voluntary work in institutions serving children.

There is significant difference ( $t=4.077$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) between members of the profession who read books on children ( $n=138$ ;  $X = 88.54$ ) and those who do not read books on children ( $n=74$ ;  $X = 81.28$ ).

With regard to following news about children, scores for members of the profession who follow news about children is higher than the scores for members of the profession who do not follow the news about children

(n=11; X =75,09). The difference between these two groups is significant in favour of members of profession following news about children (t=2.815; p < 0.01).

Significant difference in scores was found for those who had knowledge about children’s games as compared to those who did not (t= 3.870; p<0.001).

Between members of the profession doing voluntary work and those not doing voluntary work there is no significant difference (t=0.506, p>0.001).

**TABLE 3: Variables Related to Activities Conducted for/with Children**

<i>State</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>Statistics</i>
<b>Reading books on children</b>				
Yes	138	88.54	11.63	t = 4.077**
No	74	81.28	13.60	
<b>Following the news about children</b>				
Yes	186	86.33	12.62	t = 2.815*
No	11	75.09	16.87	
<b>Have knowledge about children’s games</b>				
Yes	184	87.56	12.07	t = 3.870**
No	21	76.67	13.50	
<b>Doing voluntary work</b>				
Yes	41	85.07	16.82	t = - 0.506
No	165	86.21	11.75	

\* p < 0.05                      \*\* p < 0.001

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The study determined significant differences in the scores for male and female members of the profession. Women, by their very nature, are instinctively inclined to care giving. Moreover, societal roles of motherhood predispose women with attributes favourable to care giving. This could explain the higher scores for women (Özgüven, 2005).

Higher scores were obtained for respondents belonging to the age group of 41 years and above. The lowest scores were seen for those in the age group of 26–30 years. The period between the ages of 26–30 years can be considered as the period of preparing and adaptation to new social roles. In this period, people get engaged, married, and encounter new challenges in life. They are saddled with additional responsibilities of married life including adapting to their spouses and marital family (Onur,

2003). Therefore, people belonging to this age group are more focused on their private lives rather than work. Age 41 years and above can be considered as the maturation period of individuals. Individuals are in the most productive sphere of their lives and perceive events realistically, are precise in determining their needs, and are better equipped with coping mechanisms to deal with stressful situations (Onur, 2003). Thus, caregivers serving in the child protection services during their middle age may understand children's problems better and care about them deeply.

Divorced members of the profession have the highest average of scores, while single and married members of the profession have lower scores on BLOCS. A similar study conducted by Duyan and Gelbal (2010) also reported that married teachers have a more favourable attitude towards children as compared to single and divorced teachers. The results of this study are specific to professionals working in the area of protection services. Child protection services operate for twenty four hours every day and care givers have to fill in for the absence of parents besides fulfilling professional responsibilities.

This study also reveals that caregivers have higher scores for 'liking children' when compared to the scores achieved by other members of the profession. Caregivers are followed by child educators, social service specialists, child development specialists, psychiatrists and teachers respectively in the variable 'liking children'. Social service specialists, psychiatrists and child development specialists usually work with caregivers, teachers and child educators on the same floor of the buildings located in institutions. As caregivers are responsible for the children's physical care, they are closer to children. Teachers serve as group leaders and they work with children closely too. Therefore, it is worrisome to find that teachers have the lowest average of scores on BLOCS.

With regard to change in the place of work, members of the profession who have never changed their place of work have the highest score average on BLOCS. These professionals like to work with children and are sympathetic to their needs and hence, do not want to change their place of work. Similarly, those not inclined to change their place of work also obtained high scores.

Working conditions in the Social Services and Child Protection Institutions are very harsh and the level of burnout among personnel is very high (Işıkhan, 2010). Hence, improved working conditions will ensure better satisfaction at work.

Members of the profession who read books on children obtained higher scores from BLOCS. This finding is similar to the findings of the study on teachers conducted by Gelbal and Duyan (2010) and another study on pediatric nurses conducted by Erdem and Duyan (2011). As shown for the other occupational groups, members of these professions can understand children better and can easily empathise with them if they read books on children. At the same time, reading books on children enables people to see the events unfolding through the eyes of children. The fact that members of the social service profession are more favourably disposed to reading books about children is beneficial to the cause of children's welfare.

The average scores obtained from BLOCS is higher for those who follow news and information concerning children. This finding is corroborated with the findings of a study on teachers conducted by Gelbal and Duyan (2010) and another study on pediatric nurses by Erdem and Duyan (2011).

There is a significant difference in attitude towards children among members of the profession concerning knowledge about children's games. This finding has some parallels with reading books on children and following news about children. Hence, playing games can help caregivers to establish closer relationships with children. This will help professionals to identify problems faced by children.

Professionals, who voluntarily spend additional time with children, have higher average scores on BLOCS. Here, it must be kept in mind that volunteering to do additional activities with children is a matter of personal choice.

In conclusion, lack of one-to-one relationship between adults and children causes introversion, socialisation problems and behavioural problems among children. Therefore, while selecting personnel for institutions giving protection services for children, it is important to determine the attitude of professionals towards children.

In-service training programmes should be held to enrich the knowledge of professionals on the different ways and methods to spend time with children effectively. With the aid of routine evaluations, members of the profession who experience 'burn out' or have low levels for 'liking children' can be directed to work in other institutions to improve efficiency.

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