

CHILDHOOD TRADITIONS AND DIFFICULTIES OF SYRIAN FAMILIES UNDER TEMPORARY PROTECTION IN TURKEY: WAR, IMMIGRATION AND CHILDREN

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Abstract

The fact that people move to another country to protect their families brings with many difficulties. The purpose of this research is to analyze the child-rearing traditions and difficulties of Syrian families under temporary protection with a preschool child and to reveal their experiences. The population of this research consists of the provinces of Kilis and Gaziantep. Its participants are refugee families with preschool children who fled the civil war in Syria and came to Turkey. These interviews were held to gather information about the participants' social life before the war, the war period, the time of migration, settling in Turkey and child education. The codes were created by analyzing the content of the collected data, one of the qualitative analysis methods, and the codes were combined under themes. As a result of the analysis of the data, the research findings were gathered under four main themes: pre-war, war and migration; integration of refugee families to Turkey; and child education; and broken families. The research findings were discussed with the relevant studies in the literature, and suggestions were made in line with the findings.

Keywords: Early childhood education, Refugee Children, Preschool Education

Introduction

It is known that resettlement to a new country for the protection of one's family brings with many difficulties (Baghdasarian, Lampa & Osman, 2021). High unemployment rates, discrimination in the labor market, poverty and settling in socio-economically disadvantaged areas are more common among refugees, all of which have negative effects on positive parenting prospects (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007; Spicer, 2008). Immigrants constitute almost 4% of the world population (United Nations, 2016). As the proportion of people migrating rises, the problems in the countries of immigration increase. Especially; there are severe problems in housing, nutrition and education. In today's world, especially the economic concerns of the countries and oil, natural gas, gold, diamond etc. Strong countries can invade weak countries and start wars by waging wars

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by force or making different excuses from weaker countries (Karasu, 2013; Yalçın & Simsar, 2020). In addition, it is also the case in the uprisings that people started in order to live more democratically. The most well-known of these is undoubtedly the "Arab Spring" freedom uprising, one of the most significant events in the 21st century.

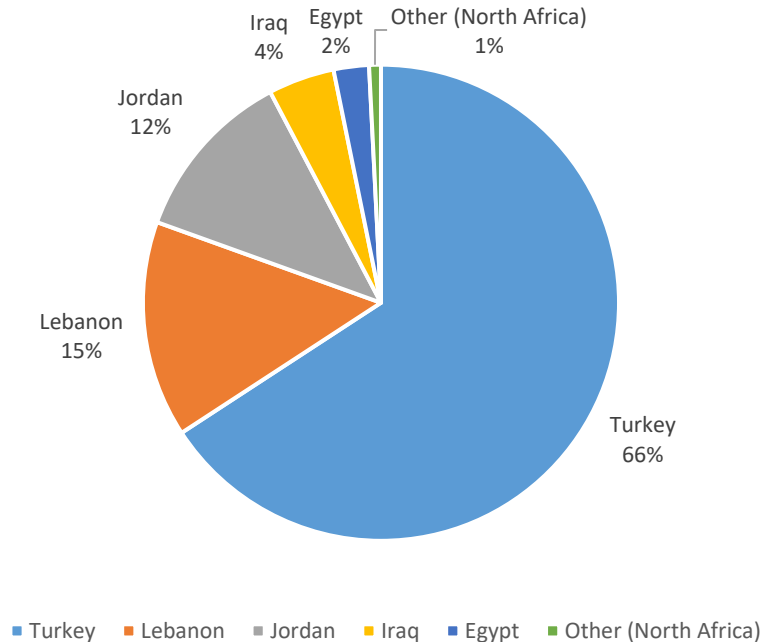
Internal Turmoil

Arab spring is the name that emerged in North African and Middle Eastern countries and means revolution (Güleç, 2012). Authoritarian regimes and unfavourable living conditions can be cited among the main reasons for this uprising. This revolt spread over the internet with the name "Let's give jasmine to the police", and this movement that ousted Ben Ali from power was named the "jasmine revolution". Then, in a short time, the rebellions spread to Tunisia, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Mauritania, Sudan, Oman, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Djibouti, Morocco, Iraq, Bahrain, Iran, Libya and Kuwait which were called the Arab Spring.

While this uprising movement against the current regime ended with small-scale events in some countries, in some countries, it has continued and continues with events that cover the whole country and last for years. Naturally, in countries where the Arab spring took a long time, losses, migrations, and grievances increased. Especially the fact that Syria is our border neighbour has negatively affected Turkey. The kinship relations between Turks and Syrians and the fact that the Republic of Turkey opened the border gates to immigrants who were victims of war greatly increased the number of Syrian refugees coming to Turkey.

Figure 1

Distribution of Syrian Refugees by Country (UNHCR, 2022).



The increase in the number of refugees has emerged as problems such as more housing needs?, lack of infrastructure in health and education, especially in small cities such as Kilis. Similar situations are experienced in other countries as well. Among these, serious problems are experienced in the education of refugee children and equality of opportunity according to the studies conducted in the United States, which receives the most immigrants in the world (Child Trends Databank, 2015). More than half of the

refugees who escaped from the Syrian war and took refuge in Turkey are children of school age (Oktay, 2013).

Syrian Refugee Children

Unlike adults, refugee children greatly need attention and care because they cannot protect themselves, express their feelings, and meet their needs (Yalçın, 2017; Yalçın & Simsar, 2020). In the early childhood period, when children's mental, physical and emotional development is the fastest, adverse environmental conditions negatively affect children's development (Behtoui & Neergaard, 2016).

Studies on Syrian refugee children in our country are very few. From these studies; according to the results of Özer and Şirin's (2012) study titled "Syrian refugee children and their families", the vast majority of children currently live with trauma and depression, as a large proportion of children are exposed to intensely stressful events. Considering the traumatic situation of Syrian refugee children, especially in the 0-6 age range, they need to get used to the new country, environment, and peers somehow (Mart, Simsar & Uyanik, 2022). In addition, these children should be included in a formal education environment that will accelerate their adaptation to the new culture they came from and make them forget the past days by making new friends. When it comes to education, it is known that it will not be easy for a child born in a different country, who does not know Turkish or knows very little, to adapt to his new environment and friends. Şen (2013), on the other hand, focused on the causes of the ongoing civil wars in Syria, the number of people who died in these wars according to official records, and the Syrian refugees who became homeless or had to migrate to their countries. Another study was done by Orhan (2013), and this study; aimed to reveal the effect of the process known as the Arab Spring in Arab countries. In this context, the internal and external factors that triggered the social movements in the Arab world, known as the Arab spring, were discussed. The study on refugees and their basic needs such as shelter, food and health was conducted by Karadağ and Altıntaş (2011). In this study, refugees continue their lives in very difficult conditions, and they have to live with great health problems. In the study conducted by Erdoğan (2014), it was concluded that although there are negative behaviours such as racism, hostility and hatred towards Syrian refugees in the regional sense, Turkish society generally accepts Syrian refugees. However, the schooling rate and education are not at the desired level due to language problems. Deniz (2009), on the other hand, concluded in his study that the biggest problem encountered in the education of refugee children is language.

Increasing global displacement over the past few decades has led many families to resettle with their children or become parents in a new country (Baghdasarian, Lampa & Osman, 2021). Although parenting shows similarities between cultures in many ways, socioeconomic and sociocultural aspects and traditions of parents shape families' parentings (Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Ochocka & Janzen, 2008; Yagmurulu & Sanson, 2009). For this reason, being both a refugee and a parent can become a very challenging situation for individuals. It is known that most refugees have settled in countries close to their parenting values (UNHCR, 2020). Yet the consequences of seeking shelter can be devastating for the well-being of refugee parents and children (El-Khani, Ulph, Peters, & Calam, 2016).

In this study, in-depth research was conducted on pre-war social life, child-rearing traditions, the events experienced during the war and migration, asylum in Turkey, and children's education of Syrian refugee families were researched.

Purpose of the Research

This study aims to analyze a Syrian family's child-rearing traditions and

difficulties under temporary protection with a preschool child and reveal their experiences.

Method

Model of the Research

A case study, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in this research, which aims to reveal the experiences of a Syrian family under temporary protection who have a child in the preschool age by examining the child-rearing traditions and the difficulties they experience in depth. In this study, we will use the name case study. A case study is a unit in the universe, such as individuals, families, schools, hospitals, associations, etc. It is a model that aims to judge that unit by determining the depth and breadth of places like itself and its relations with its surroundings. A case study is defined by Yin (2009) as follows: It is a research method that studies a current phenomenon in its real-life environment and is used in situations where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the environment it is in are not clear and more than one source of evidence or data is available.

Table 1

Information about the participants

Participant	Gender	Education	Age	Occupation in Syria	Occupation in Turkey	Marital status	Place of residence
P1	male	primary school	32	customs driver	cleaning worker	married father of 4 children, 1 of whom is a boy	Kilis
P2	male	middle school	20	customs driver	cleaning worker	single	Kilis
P3	male	middle school dropout	22	pharmacy worker	waiter	single	Gaziantep
P4	male	high school dropout	22	student	waiter	single	Gaziantep
P5	female	middle school	23	student	cleaning worker	single	Kilis
P6	female	high school	26	housewife	housewife	married	Kilis
P7	female	high school	23	housewife	housewife	single	Kilis
P8	male	high school dropout	26	self-employment	self-employment	single	Kilis

Stake (2000) divided the case study into three: real, instrumental and collaborative. In this study, "Real case", one of the case study types, will be used. Real case study; allows

researching a subject of which little knowledge is known. It is the work done to understand a particular situation better or remove its complexity (Glesne, 2013).

Universe and Participants

The research population consists of the provinces of Kilis and Gaziantep, and the participants are refugee families with preschool children who escaped from the civil war in Syria and took refuge in Turkey. Table 1 contains information about the participants. As can be seen in Table 1, the age range of the employees varies between 20 and 32. However, the participants work in similar jobs and as workers, especially in Turkey. In addition, although not included in the table, there are kinship relations between the participants.

Data Collection

In order to establish the theoretical basis of the research, besides the information obtained as a result of scanning domestic and foreign sources, data were also collected from different data sources during the application process. The semi-structured interview form used in the case study in the first stage of the research was used. The researcher prepared this form, and after the expert opinion, after making the necessary corrections in terms of language corrections and suitability for the purpose, the form was made ready for data collection by making a pilot application. In general, the semi-structured interview form; consists of 9 basic questions and sounding questions under the title of themes such as pre-war social life, war period, migration time, Turkey's settlement and child education.

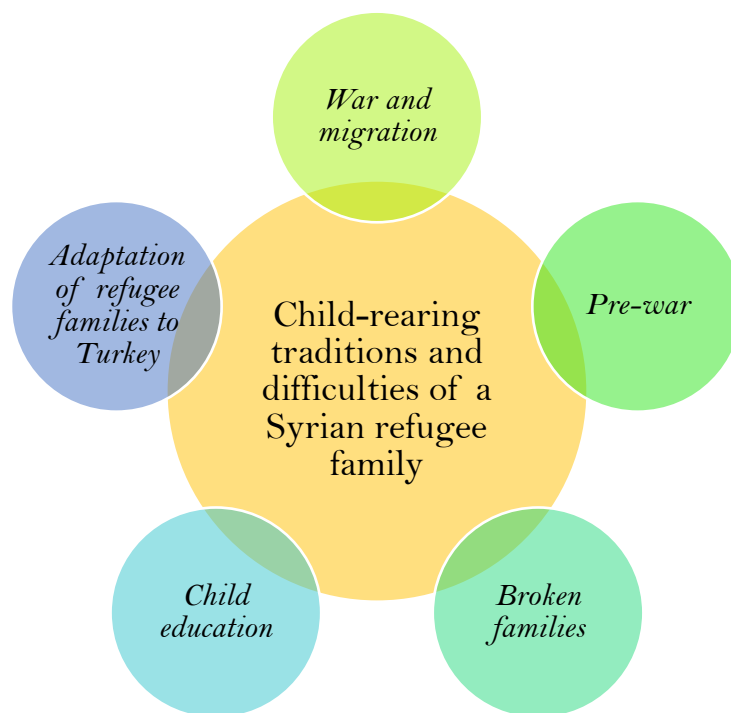
Within the scope of the research, a Syrian volunteer family was first found, a meeting was held about the purpose and scope of the study, and the family was informed. Verbal consent was obtained from all participants. These interviews were held to gather information about the experiences and views of the participants about their social life in Syria before the war, the war period, the time of migration, settling in Turkey and child education. Interviews were held at the participants' workplaces and when they were convenient. Before the interviews, the employer was informed about the purpose and scope of the work, and verbal permission was obtained from the participants' employers. The researchers recorded the interviews in writing at the time of the interview to avoid data loss. The interviews lasted between 23 and 33 minutes.

Analysis of Data

All interviews were planned as semi-structured, and when necessary, questions that were not included in the interview questions were also included. First, one-to-one transcripts of the data obtained from the interviews were made and transferred to the computer environment. In the analysis part of the research, content analysis was used in qualitative data analysis methods. This analysis; is a research technique in which texts are organized, classified, compared, and an in-depth analysis is made by drawing theoretical conclusions from the texts (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). This study aims to analyze a Syrian family's child-rearing traditions and difficulties under temporary protection with a preschool child and reveal their experiences. For this purpose, codes were created due to the content analysis made with the data obtained from the interviews and these codes were collected under themes.

Findings

As a result of the content analysis, the child-rearing traditions and difficulties of a Syrian refugee family with a pre-school child; *pre-war, war and migration, adaptation of refugee families to Turkey and child education and broken families* themes.

Figure 2*Themes emerging from the research data***Social Life in Pre-War Syria**

As a result of the findings obtained from the research, we need to know the social life in Syria before the war to better understand and explain the difficulties experienced by Syrian refugee families. All of the participants stated that, especially before the war in Syria, all kinds of products (food, consumption, fuel, etc.) were relatively cheap compared to Turkish prices. They did not even pay any fees for their electricity and water use. This situation was explained by P1 (face-to-face interview, 2017) during the interviews, *"Everything was perfect in our lives. There was an order. We always lived in big families. ... The food was cooked the same, and we shared it; we were very comfortable; Everything was free. Women were not working; there was no need anyway; Everything was free (free of charge)"*.

On the other hand, it is another finding of the study that the participants generally do the work collaboratively, especially the pregnant women and the women who have just given birth. Relatives or neighbours usually do these jobs. In addition, it has been concluded that children are significant in their society, regardless of their gender, and that the child is valued. On the subject, P1 said,

... the same, man or girl is treated the same, they are all valuable. There is no difference between boys and girls, families care about every child", while one of the participants said, "... We have the same boy and girl. We say it came from God. We love both. We say well what God sent.

Another finding of the research is that some of the practices of Syrian families regarding child-rearing are similar to the child-rearing traditions of Turkish families. P1, one of the participants, expressed this situation as follows. P1:

When the child starts walking, the first person to leave the mosque after the first Friday prayer is cut with scissors When the child starts walking, the first person to leave the mosque after the first Friday prayer is cut with scissors (When the child starts walking, the first person to leave the mosque after the first Friday

prayer is cut with scissors (It is an old tradition that the first person to come out in Friday prayer cuts a rope with scissors and is believed to be auspicious)). This child's fate is made to be lucky, and this must be done at the child's first walk. Then we distribute sweets and chocolates to everyone, neighbours or something. There is a meal made with rice, a hedik meal, which is also made in Turks when teething. Hedik is boiled, bulgur and colourful candies, relatives, neighbours are called, and Mevlüt is taught. The food is eaten, and the remaining food is distributed to relatives and neighbours.

Mentioning the practices of raising children and especially the first walking, first speaking, and teething practices, it was stated that these practices were similar to the practices in Turkey.

War and Immigration

It was concluded that the reactions of all participants, especially when the war first started, were the same. All participants thought that the war would be short and there was no need to emigrate. On the subject, P1 said,

Our family (the war was over) waited. We always thought it would not take long. Opponents came and deported us to Aleppo. We stayed there for three years. We had much trouble, we looked for a job there, but we could not find it. We had some savings; the room was finished." He expressed his views. Mohammed said: "When the opposition came, and bombs started to be dropped on Azaz, we first fled to Aleppo. We stayed there for one year. I worked as a waitress in a restaurant. When the war started there, we fled to Azez again.

He expressed it. P3, on the other hand, expressed his thoughts on this subject,

At first we thought that the war would not last very long and we did not go right away, we waited for it to end. Then we looked, and it started to get longer, and we fled to Aleppo. We stayed in Aleppo for about 1.5 years. Aleppo also started to get involved. We fled to Azez again.

He expressed it as On the other hand, P4 said his thoughts on this subject,

For example, we said that we never thought it would happen like this, it will take one day, it will take one month, but it will end, but it did not happen. We thought that Assad would leave in a week and the war would be over. It has been six years, and it continues.

Among the findings, the participants encountered some problems during the migration process, but they managed to reach Turkey. On the subject, P4 said,

We had no security of life; we had to take the things we could and fled. We could afford those with food or money to buy food and drink on the way. We left many of our belongings in both Azez and Aleppo.

P3 expressed it as follows:

It was Ramadan when we came to Azeze. We said in the middle of Ramadan that the war would stop now. However, one night, the planes hit

a neighbourhood, it all disappeared. Two hundred fifty people died in that explosion; we all left our homes and fled to the fields. We lived in the fields for about ten days.

Another participant, P1,

Our family waited. We always thought it would not take long. Opponents came and deported us to Aleppo. We stayed there for three years. We had much trouble, we looked for a job there, but we could not find it. We had some savings; the room was finished. With that money, we made our living in that process. We had no job; we had no money, we had to. There was no war in Turkey. Qatar and Saudi Arabia were closed. These countries were always Arab countries, and they spoke Arabic, but they did not open the doors to us; only Turkey was open. We had run out of money, Aleppo was not livable, we had to migrate to Turkey. There was an easier route, but the opposition did not allow us to go, so we had to take the Aleppo-Idlib-Afrin-Azez-Kilis route. There was an easier way, but we were in danger of death because of the opponents, so we had to come from the safe way. My fathers and sisters, seven families, 60 people in total, carried our belongings in cars.

He expressed his views and explained the difficulties they experienced during the migration process. Expressing that significantly children are adversely affected by the migration process, P3 said,

Children have been challenging. Especially during the migration, they were left hungry and thirsty. We somehow endured, but they had a hard time, and there were some sick ones. Moreover, some kids have picked up bad habits. At the age of 10, some people started smoking, alcohol and weed. They were very derelict.

Broken Families

Based on the findings obtained from the interviews, it can be said that the most common complaint of Syrian refugee families is that they are separated from their families. While all participants talked about the social life and families before the war, they mentioned that relatives and neighbours did the work by helping each other. P6 said,

When it is learned that a woman is pregnant in a house, relatives and neighbours support the family together. They are with them financially and morally. However, we are very lonely here; families and relatives have dispersed."

P2 said,

We used to live together in Azez with nine people, parents. Now our family has broken up. Parents are in Azez, and two sisters are in Azez. I have not seen them for three years. We have seven siblings in total, 2 in Azez, 1 in Aleppo, 1 in Istanbul, three people in the church with me.

In the researcher observation notes about Muhammad, there is a statement as follows. "It is unfortunate that his family has fallen apart. Tears fill his eyes when he talks about them" (Researcher Observation Notes, 2017).

Adaptation of Refugee Families to Turkey and Child Education

Adaptation of refugee families to their new society and education of refugee children, who are the future of Syrian society, are critical issues. In particular, the old habits of refugees and the importance they attach to their children's education are essential. P5 on the subject,

The school ended with the war. In general, those who have the opportunity can teach, and those who do not have to bring money to work. In Azez, it was obligatory to send children to school. If the child did not go to school for a week or a month, the judge would write the punishment, and the police would come and hold the family accountable. "Why don't you send the child" but I cannot send the children to school right now. Schools are expensive; there is a monthly service fee of 100 Turkish lira.

Financial impossibilities also affect children's quality of life and academic life. P3 expressed his thoughts on the subject,

Education depends on the situation. People with money and good financial situations usually send their children to school. In our family, only my brother studied, my father could only read it. Apart from that, when the child reaches the age of 10, he is put into a job to learn a profession. The child both learns a profession and gives financial support to the family. We are six siblings, three girls, three boys, one older brother studied; the others did not.

He expressed it as It was concluded that the participants were able to learn a language and adapt to the new place they came from, primarily through people they knew before and thanks to the help of Turks.

P1 expressed his views on this subject,

There were friends who had come to Kilis before, we contacted them somehow, they helped us find a job. There were Turks with whom we did business when there was no war, we contacted them, and they helped us find a house and a job."

P1 said, having problems with language learning and communication:

The two communities are very close to each other, but we had a language problem. We could not explain ourselves; I do not understand them, they do not understand me. In a way, we told it ourselves through friends or with our hands." Speaking about the hospitality of the Turks, P2 said, "People helped us... Our landlord did not take rent from us for 2-3 months. Let us get used to it so we can find a job.

Discussion

In the research findings, language and communication come first among the problems experienced by Syrian families under temporary protection. Syrian families and children do not know Turkish and cannot express themselves, which causes serious communication problems. This result shows parallelism with other studies on the subject (Ataman, 2015; Deniz, 2009; Erdoğan, 2014; Moinolnolki, & Han, 2017; Tunç, 2015; UNHCR, 2016; UNICEF, 2013; Yalçın & Simsar, 2020).

Another finding of the research is that Syrian refugee families do not have sufficient financial means and cannot support their children's education in this regard. Other studies also support this finding in the literature (Baghdasaryan, Lampa & Osman, 2021; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007; Deniz, 2009; Kiang & Supple, 2016; Moinolnolki, & Han, 2017; Spicer, 2008; Tunç, 2015; Türkmen Sanduvaç, 2013; Yalçın & Simsar, 2020; Zolberg & Benda, 2001).

Based on the findings obtained from the interviews, it can be said that the most common complaint of Syrian refugee families is that they are separated from their families. All of the participants stated that while talking about the social life and families before the war, the work was done by relatives and neighbours by helping each other. On the other hand, in pre-war Syria, families with financial power could send their children to school, while other families were sent to work from the age of ten to learn a job and a profession. The same situation is repeated in the country they came from as refugees. In addition to this, among the results obtained from the interviews, especially the children faced with serious hunger, thirst and disease during the migration process, in addition, the children who were left unattended started bad habits such as alcohol and cigarettes and were psychologically affected by the war and migration process. These findings overlap with other studies in the literature (Baghdasaryan, Lampa & Osman, 2021; Kelly et al., 2016; Karadağ and Altıntaş, 2011; Orhan, 2013; Özer and Şirin, 2012; Şen, 2013).

Suggestions

For refugee children not to fall behind in education and provide them with a more effective education, an applicable education program can be prepared for different age groups.

Free transportation and training can be provided so that all refugees in financial difficulties can be injured in this training program. In addition, nutrition and health services can be provided to families and children.

In the programs prepared for refugee children, education can be provided in the mother tongue to receive a better education.

Within the prepared program, Turkish lessons can be added so that refugee children and families can more easily adapt to the new country and learn their language.

Free environments can be provided for Syrian families and children living both in refugee camps and outside the camps to experience their own culture and identity.

In addition to educational programs to save children from the negative effects of war and migration, entertaining social activities can be organized periodically so that refugee children and families can benefit from these activities free of charge.

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Academician *Vakkas Yalçın* graduated from Muş Alparslan University, Department of Preschool Teaching in 2010. In 2012, he started to work at Hakkâri University. Then he started to work as an academician at Kilis 7 December University, Department of Preschool Education. In 2016, he received the title of science specialist in the field of preschool education. In 2019, he founded Superbaba Schools. In 2020, he received the title of doctor in the field of preschool education, and in 2022 he was appointed as a Dr. Faculty Member in the Department of Preschool Education. Yalçın is still working as an academician, and has has many international articles on STEM, design thinking, 21st-century skills, and school adaptation in early childhood.