



Ulusal ve Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi
The Journal of International Social Research
Volume: 3 Issue: 12 Summer 2010

THE MILLENNIUM CHILD POVERTY IN DEVELOPING TURKEY

Şengül HABLEMİTOĞLU*

Yasemin ÖZKAN**

Eda PURUTÇUOĞLU***

Abstract

In today's affluent societies, children are one of the most important and vulnerable special groups. A widespread perception is that children are at risk both psycho-socially and economically, and they are the innocent group of rapid changes in nowadays' world. The rate of child poverty has tendency to rise for third decades, and the income gap between rich and poor has influence on children's welfare. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, more than 5.6 million Turkish children under the age of 15 live in poverty especially in rural areas, which means that their caregivers cannot effort necessities like nutrition, education, and protection. The change in family structure and family size such as the breakdown of the traditional nuclear family, the decrease in earnings, the rise in unemployment, the impact of globalization and the low educational level of women in developing countries may be seen as the major reasons of child poverty. This article aims to display the relationship between poverty and children by evaluating the current conditions in developing Turkey and to make some recommendations to reduce the child poverty as globally. Thereby, this article has been written as a literature review by evaluating the various researches' results in order to find out both the statistical results and information about child poverty in Turkey.

Key Words: Child Poverty, Welfare, Children's Well-being.

Introduction

In today's affluent societies, children are one of the most important and vulnerable special groups. A widespread perception is that children are at risk both psycho-socially and economically, and they are the innocent group of rapid changes in nowadays' world (Lichter, 1997). By the middle of the century, the world's richest nations were confident that poverty would be overcome by a combination of economic growth and welfare spending. A prediction that poverty would still afflict significant numbers of their children in the 21st century would not have been believed. Today, despite a doubling and redoubling of national incomes in most nations since 1950, the world is falling short of its promise and commitment to ensure that every child enjoys a safe and nurturing childhood. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which came into force in 1989, provides children – in both rich and poor countries – with the right to a childhood in which they can learn, play, enjoy full health and develop to their potential. However, 15 years after the adoption of the Convention and after more than 15 years of market-led economic growth, governments and the international community are still far from fulfilling children's rights and creating a world fit for

* Prof. Dr., Department of Social Work, Faculty of Health Science, University of Ankara

** Assoc.Prof. Dr., Department of Social Work, Faculty of Health Science, University of Ankara

children (UNICEF, 2000; Minujin *et.al.*, 2006). A recent UNICEF Report (2007) lists the well-being of children and young people as to their average rank for the six dimensions:

- material well-being (related to income, poverty, material goods),
- health and safety,
- educational well-being,
- behaviours and risks,
- family and peer relationships and

• subjective well-being (how the child sees themselves)- in 21 rich countries. According to the report, no country features in the top third of rankings for all six dimensions of child well-being, and unfortunately, Turkey has an insufficient data to be included in the overview of OECD countries. It can be seen that over half of the children in the developing world live in poverty (Minujin *et.al.* 2006). The condition of children not only shapes their own futures but also the future of their countries. The varied detrimental impacts of the poverty they face in childhood accumulate as they age into adulthood, increasing the likelihood that they will become the poor parents of tomorrow (Anonymous (a), 2008). Thereby the study begins as a theory focus of how the poverty that is the result of a structural changes effect the children in developing Turkey. Accordingly, the aim of this article is to understand the influence of poverty on children and to present the overview of the millennium child poverty in developing Turkey.

Definition of poverty

In both academic used and politic arguments, poverty can be defined and measured in two principle dimensions.

Absolute poverty and Relative poverty.

The inability to adequately secure the basic necessities of life, which include food, clothing, and shelter, constitutes *absolute poverty*. *Relative poverty* is conceptualized as a condition of material and social existence that is far below the average requirements of a particular culture (Ropers, 1991). In such a case, relative poor defines as a people who has low income under the allowable consumption level in the society. (Anonymous, 2002). In this approach, there is a comparison between different social-economic groups by resulting inequality (Öztürk, 2008).

Notwithstanding the widespread use of the monetary approach, several development organizations see poverty as a phenomenon that cannot be defined only in monetary terms. They recognize that poverty is multifaceted and cannot be measured and resolved only through monetary means. Several organizations view poverty as a multi-faceted problem that requires comprehensive strategies to address its many feature (Minujin *et.al.*, 2006). For instance, UNDP (United Nations Development Program) defines poverty as being deprived of the opportunities (life long wellbeing, a creative life, an average standard of living, freedom, self confidence, prestige) that are mandatory for human development and hinders the concept from being put into a mere financial meaning (Uzun, 2003).

The concept of “poverty” is not merely used as being poor but it also used as a concept defining a position related to society. Depending on the literature, three concepts are salient in the area: *social exclusion, underclass, marginality*. These concepts emerge in different geographies, and of course derive from and point to different bodies of social theory and policy. One of the most important elements of poverty is social exclusion (Buğra *et.al.*, 2003). Being deprived of opportunities of using civic, social, cultural and political rights mean social exclusion (Anonymous, 2002). Poverty makes it difficult to participate into the society while hindering social integration. Excluded social groups’ participation in to economic activities gets difficult and experienced poverty can intensify. Economic, special, cultural and political exclusion feeding each other

creates social exclusion (Öztürk, 2008). Underclass is more often used when describing the state of people who held jobs but have later lost them because of transformations in the economy and who, because of their social position, now continue their lives not as a social class, but as a stratum below social classes in their own residential areas or ghettos (Wilson, 1987). Other than the classic class structure, sub-class which is under the working class, is known by its long term unemployment and poverty, lack of education, irregular employment and dependence on social aid. With these characteristics, sub-class is one of the distinct forms of urban poverty being exposed to social exclusion and having troubles in integrating into urban life (Öztürk, 2008). Marginality, which is the last element, is a term more often used when expressing a state of non-integration to society. A radical extension of this concept would be that those who are marginalized expect nothing from the system, whether economic, political or cultural, and attempt to find solutions to their problems by themselves (Wilson, 1987).

The causes of poverty

Many different factors have been cited to explain why poverty occurs, no single explanation has gained universal acceptance. Some experts suggest, for instance, that the world has too many people, too few jobs, and not enough food. But such basic causes are quite intractable and not easily eradicated. In most cases, the causes and effects of poverty interact, so that what makes people poor also creates conditions that keep them poor. Primary factors that may lead to poverty include (1) overpopulation, (2) the unequal distribution of resources in the world economy, (3) inability to meet high standards of living and costs of living, (4) inadequate education and employment opportunities, (5) environmental degradation, (6) certain economic and demographic trends, and (7) welfare incentives. In such a case these factors may also help explain why many people have much more than they need to live in comfort, while many others do not have enough resources to live. (Anonymous(b), 2008; Anonymous(c), 2008; Corbett, 2008).

Child poverty

Poverty threatens children by depriving them of opportunities they need to live, grow and develop. It strengthens or augments inequalities related to society, economy and gender while hindering children from utilizing equal opportunities, and obstructs families and societies from providing them with protective environments leaving them without any protection against exploitation, abuse, violence, discrimination and exclusion. Poverty which weakens families' and societies' ability to take care of children also intensifies the effect of phenomena like HIV/AIDS or armed conflict which is an additional threat for childhood period (UNICEF, 2005). Children under the threat of poverty are the ones who are from single-parent families, families with multiple children, families of an ethnic or racial minority, migrant, unemployed families, families who can not work or families with disabled or chronically sick members. Besides, children from families with minimum wage, families in informal sector working without social security are also defined as children in poverty (Öztürk, 2008).

UNICEF defines child poverty as the deprivation of a range of both material and social supports and services that it considers to be essential to ensure children's well-being. UNICEF's working definition of child poverty is: Children living in poverty [are those who] experience deprivation of the material, spiritual and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society. According to UNICEF, the poverty children experience with their hands, minds and hearts is interrelated. For example, children from poor households may be engaged in child labour, which may negatively impact a child's cognitive and physical development by depriving the child of school (Minujin, 2006). Child poverty is different today from poverty in the past. The rise in child poverty has occurred simultaneously with rising age inequality, real declines in income among poor children, a growing gap between rich and poor children, increasing dependence on welfare income, a changing family and spatial ecology of poverty, and the growing

incidence of chronic or persistent poverty (Lichter, 1997). Also the changing of family life and marriage (e.g. divorce) has increased both the outside of marriage births and the poverty

Child poverty in Turkey

Turkey is not a poor country by global standards, although the Turkish Statistical Institute (2006) found that a fifth of the population were at risk of poverty (UNICEF(b), 2007). In such a case this poverty closely linked to low education on the one hand, and unpaid family employment, irregular employment, self-employment and employment in agriculture on the other (UNICEF, 2008).

It was generally agreed that improved employment opportunities for adults — especially women — would go some way towards alleviating child poverty. According to TÜİK Turkey's labour force participation rate was quite low in 2006 at 46% with women comprising less than 25% of the registered workforce. However, the problem of child poverty is much more complex than the issue of income, encompassing a range of issues that are crucial to the well-being and development of children such as:

- access to health care;
- access to day care;
- pre-school education;
- access to primary, secondary and tertiary level education;
- good nutrition and physical development;
- child protection;
- the right to live in a family environment.

As dependents, children add to the cost of running a household and the poverty rate of a family will rise according to the number of children — particularly in rural areas where cash income is more limited.

Today, 38.0 % of our population is under the age of 19 while children between the ages of 0 to 6 compose 11.0 % of the current population. This number is important in showing the high proportion of child population in terms of the general population. According to the results of Household Budget Survey 2005 of Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK 2006), 19.5% of the children between 0-6 years of age constituting 9.3% of the population are determined as being poor (UNICEF (c), 2007; Öztürk, 2008). The proportion of rural population to the general population is considerably high in Turkey. If food and non-food poverty data are examined between the years of 2002 and 2006, the difference between rural and urban poverty increased drastically in five years. (See table 1)

Table 1. Percentage of children under 15 years of age living in food and non-food poverty in Turkey, 2002–2006

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Total	34.55	37.04	34.02	27.71	25.23
Urban	30.59	30.43	24.22	19.51	13.50
Rural	41.10	46.44	49.34	40.60	43.63

Source: TÜİK, 2006

Endeavour towards decline of the child poverty in Turkey

Studies aimed at decreasing child poverty in our country is focused on their education. The effect of education is low in decreasing the effects of poverty in childhood. Education, which is thought to be useful in eliminating poverty in adulthood, supports children's cognitive, social and psychological development letting them access social resources.

Studies in eliminating poverty in Turkey had been developed collectively with state institutions, UNICEF and especially civil society initiatives of private sector.

The Girls' Education Campaign

The Girls' Education Campaign supports girls in continuing their education in primary level, which was initiated by the association of the Ministry of Education and UNICEF under the scope of 2001-2005 main application plan, began in 2003 in 10 provinces of East and South East Anatolia where participation of girls are the lowest in education to equalize their participation with boys. The difference of girls' participation to education was 7% in 2003 compared to boys while it dropped to 5,8 % in 2005.

Regional Primary Boarding Schools (RPBS)

Regional Primary Boarding Schools are established to ensure that children in poverty, whose schools are closed or those living in villages without schools predominantly in provinces of the East and the South East Regions, continue their education. Children's needs of shelter, food, clothing, stationery equipment as well as their monthly allowances are provided by the state. Besides the education given in these schools, they are aimed at integrating with the local population to support their cultural, social and technological improvement. 142 000 students had been educated in schools including 4790 classrooms between 2004-2005 (Öztürk, 2008).

Conditional Cash Transfer and Green Card

Cash support systems such as the Green Card, providing health care for those who could not otherwise afford it, or the Conditional Cash Transfer scheme, which enables low income families to send their children to school, have proven to be the other effective poverty reduction strategies in Turkey. It follows that the provision of income support to families of limited means would alleviate child poverty amongst the most vulnerable low income groups. The number of children who utilized conditional cash transfer is 1.549.201. This implementation aimed the poorest 6% of the population. But as of January 2007 Conditional Cash Allowances project had been ended (UNICEF (c), 2007; Öztürk, 2008)

Early Childhood Development Project

"Evaluation of Early Childhood Development Project" had been carried out in 19 provinces for the children living in regions in poverty who are at the age of schooling without any pre-school education by the Institution of Social Services and Child Protection with the help of various non-governmental organizations and public institutions. With the project which started in 1999, 60.000 children were reached until 2005. The aim of this project was solving problems preventing poor children to begin education, assisting their application to schools, supporting their psycho-social and lingual development to provide them equal opportunity in education. Families had been provided with information related to child development and child health, while supporting them in terms of finance and psycho-social aid by utilizing various social work applications.

International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO/ IPEC)

"International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour"(IPEC) was initiated by International Labour Organization to prevent the utilization of child labour in 1992. The long term aim of the programme is to eliminate child labour utilization, while its edium and short term aims are protection of them and improving their working environment. Developing services directed to education and health of working children while providing them with psycho-social consultancy (Öztürk, 2008).

CONCLUSIONS

Poverty has many faces, changing from place to place across time and has been described in many ways. Most often, poverty is a situation people want to escape. So poverty is a call to action -- for the poor and the wealthy alike -- a call to change the world so that many more may have enough to eat, adequate shelter, access to education and health, protection from violence, and a voice in what happens in their communities (World Bank, 2008).

The condition of children not only shapes their own futures but also the future of their countries. The varied detrimental impacts of the poverty they face in childhood accumulate as they age into adulthood, increasing the likelihood that they will become the poor parents of tomorrow. To break the vicious circle covering succeeding generations, struggle must begin at childhood (Anonymous(a), 2008; UNICEF, 2005)

Poverty being a multi dimensional phenomenon necessitates a multifaceted and integrated approach. Results of the theoretical framework of the article have stipulated the following extensions:

- Definition and measurement of child poverty how children experience poverty should be taken as basis in struggling it. Child poverty must be recognized as a unique phenomenon that requires direct intervention. Indirect solutions have failed to address the special needs of children.
- The poverty debate should become comprehensive, including family, women and children in a holistic conceptual and practical approach.
- The participation and “voice of children” should be integrated as part of any child poverty approach and poverty reduction strategy (which is different from including them in the definition of poverty) (Minujin, 2006).
- Ensuring the strategies of struggling poverty prioritize children.
- Generalizing basic social and educational services and ensuring that everyone have access to them.
- Defining aims and mobilizing the parties. All related parties should take action in order to realize aims which embrace child poverty from many aspects.
- Supporting family. Families are children’s first line of defense. The longer children are away from their families, the higher their chances of facing a risk.
- Preventing gender segregation. Policies directed to women’s problem of insecurity in labour markets and fiscal policies will support eliminating child poverty.
- Encouraging local solutions and social participation. Developing countries which are successful at decreasing poverty are also encouraging social participation increasingly
- Children should be encouraged to participate into discussions on reducing poverty (UNICEF, 2005)
- The government agencies, local authorities, civil society organizations, academics, the EU, UNICEF, parents and children should help design a strategy to reduce and eventually eliminate the child poverty problem. These strategies are to include provision for universal child benefits, provision of basic education for all children, including preschool education, much closer coordination among all the agencies concerned, improved statistics and monitoring systems and respect for children’s rights, (Anonymous, 2007).

In conclusion, it is important to mention that child poverty is a critical topic in global aspect, specifically for Turkey. According to the evaluation of the article based on literature review, it has been found that there are limited studies in this field (Lichter, 1997; Minujin *et.al.*, 2006).

Due to the inadequate scientific datas, limited studies have been carried out in Turkey, as well. Thus, more research is needed in order to determine specific topics based on different variables such as the status of women, the changed family values, the well-being of community, the economic status of family, etc.

REFERENCES

- ANONYMOUS. (2002). "Sürdürülebilir Kalkınma Dünya Zirvesi", *Türkiye Ulusal Raporu (taslak)*, 85-103.
- ANONYMOUS. (2007). "Turkey's Child Poverty", *Iran Daily*, [October 22].
- ANONYMOUS. (2008a). *Young Lives: An International Study of Childhood Poverty, Why Focus on Children?*, Retrieved 12.12.2008 from <http://tinyurl.com/yn3sr6>
- ANONYMOUS. (2008b). "Poverty", *Wikipedia:The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 22.12.2008 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty>
- ANONYMOUS (2008c). "Child Poverty: We can't Eradicate It, But We Can Reduce It", Retrieved 22.12.2008 from <http://www.fightpoverty.mmbrico.com/>
- BUĞRA, A. and KEYDER, Ç. and BALABAN, U.B., and YAKUT, B. (2003). "New Poverty and the Chancing Welfare Regime of Turkey", *Report Prepared for the United Nations Development Programme*, p. 19-20.
- CORBETT, T.J. (2008). "Poverty", *Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 22.12.2008 from http://www.encarta.msn.com/text_761577020_0/Poverty.html
- LICHTER, D.T. (1997). "Poverty and Inequality among Children", *Annual Reviews Sociology*, [23], 121-145
- MINUJIN, A. and DELAMONICA, E. and DAVIDZIUK, A. and GONZALEZ, E.D. (2006). "The Definition of Child Poverty: A Discussion of Concepts and Measurements", *Environment and Urbanization*, 18[2],481-500
- ÖZTÜRK, A.B. (2008). *Kentteki Çocuk Yoksulluğu: Keçiören Örneği*, Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Sosyal Hizmet Anabilim Dalı.
- ROPER, R.H. (1991), *Persistent Poverty: The American Dream Turned Nightmare*, Plenum Press, N.Y., 25-45.
- TURKISH STATISTICAL INSTITUTE (TÜİK) (2006). *Türkiye İstatistik Yıllığı*, T.C. Başbakanlık Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, Yayın No 3063.
- UNICEF. (2005). *The State of the Worlds Children*, New York: UNICEF,.
- UNICEF. (2000a). *Child Poverty in Rich Nations*, Innocenti Report Card, [1],3-4
- UNICEF. (2007b). *No to child poverty*, Say Yes_The Quarterly Newsletter of UNICEF TURKEY
- UNICEF. (2007c). *Press Announcement: Protection Children*, Türkiye.
- UNICEF. (2008). *Children Still at High Risk of Poverty*, Say Yes The Quarterly Newsletter of UNICEF TURKEY, [Winter]
- UZUN, A.M. (2003). "Yoksulluk Olgusu ve Dünya Bankası", *C.Ü. İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi*, 4[2], 155-173.
- WILSON, W.J. (1987). *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, The Underclass and Public Policy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. "Edited from" (BUĞRA, A., KEYDER, Ç., BALABAN, U.B.,

and YAKUT, B. (2003). New Poverty and the Changing Welfare Regime of Turkey, *Report Prepared for the United Nations Development Programme*, p. 19-20.

WORLD BANK. (2008). *Poverty Analysis-Overview*, Retrieved 22.12.2008 from <http://web.worldbank.org>