

A Pilot Study On The Levels Of Awareness Of The Convention On The Rights Of The Child And Its Contents

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Abstract

Children, who used to be defined as property of fathers in the past, have started to become citizens holding their own rights at the end of a long and uphill struggle. Supporting influence of the convention on the rights of the children on this transformation cannot be denied. General principles of the UN convention on the rights of the children emphasize four fundamental right groups. The convention grounds on use of these rights by all children irrespective of their religion, language, race and ethnic origin, and prohibits discrimination in this sense. The primary source for redefining the concept of a "good" child in the society must be the Convention on the Rights of the Children. All these efforts have not created attitudes that reflect on our lives and are considered indispensable in public and social sense yet. Although legal regulations have been made concerning rights of the children, cases in which rights of the children are violated are frequently encountered. It is stated that a large mass of people are not aware of the Convention on the Rights of the Children and/or content of this convention, accordingly are not aware of rights of the children. The purpose of this study is to determine the awareness ratio of children in the 15-18 age group and women and men at the age of 25 or higher who have a child in respect of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Children and/or content of this convention. This study attempts to illuminate to what extent Turkish people are aware of laws and regulations issued concerning rights of the children, international conventions signed by Turkey in this matter, and activities carried out in Turkey regarding rights of the children. It is aimed at evaluating similar studies in Turkey in consideration of data obtained from this study and contributing to development of projects concerning recognition and awareness of rights of the children in all segments of the society. 2 five-point Likert-type scales, which consisted of expressions concerning awareness of the convention on the rights of the children and/or content of the convention as well as certain demographic characteristics, were used within the scope of the study. Scales consist of 44 questions. It also contains 9 questions for children and 7 children for adults in order to evaluate demographic characteristics of them. Both of the groups include 5 questions aimed at evaluating awareness of the Convention on the Rights of the Children. Survey forms were administered to two groups: 15-18 age children's group and adult group of fathers-mothers at the age of 25 or higher. Although questions in the scale administered to children's group were same with the one administered to adult group in terms of meaning and content, some expressions were changed in children's scale for them to understand questions more easily. At the end of the survey, there is a section stating, "If any, please mention your ideas that you want to share about the topic". Sample of the study consists of 187 high school students at secondary education level and 132 adults, who have a child, working at various professions, all of whom were randomly chosen from Istanbul.

Keywords: Rights of the children, convention on the rights of the children, recognition of the convention on the rights of the children.

INTRODUCTION

The children who were defined as the property of the father are transforming into the right-holder citizens today. The driving force behind this transformation is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The convention was accepted by the United Nations General Assembly unanimously on November 20, 1989, signed by the Republic of Turkey on September 14, 1990, ratified by the TGNA on December 1994, and came into force on January 27, 1995 by being published in the official gazette. Internationally legally binding, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is composed of 54 articles including four basic groups of rights. These four basic groups of rights are the right to life, the right to protection, the right to development, and the right to participation. In addition to these four basic groups of rights, 4 articles that are defined as the general principles of the convention are also considered important as they provide a basis to apply all the other rights. They are articles 2, 3, 6, and 12 covering “nondiscrimination”, “the best interest of the child”, “the right to survival and development”, and “considering the child’s views” [1]. The Convention on the Rights of the Child arises from the fact that the children are unable to defend themselves like the adults, and is based on the notion that the state should defend the children with all means it has at its disposal. The convention prescribes patterns of behaviors conferring responsibilities related to the child on first the parents, and then the communities, the youths, the teachers, the healthcare personnel, the security personnel, the academicians, the lawyers, the NGOs, the media, the governments... in other words, on each person and organization from the simplest citizen to the top-level statesman [2]. With the idea that it is necessary to improve the individual to improve the society, Rousseau reflects the idealism of the 18th century philosophers. The purpose of this study is to find out the levels of awareness of the youths between 15 to 18 years old and the men and women over 25 who have children of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and/or its contents. It is possible to express the question this study tries to answer as to what extent the Turkish society is aware of the laws and regulations enacted in relation to the child rights, the relevant international conventions Turkey has signed, and the activities carried out in our country in relation to this subject. Thus, this pilot study will have answered the question to what extent the Turkish society is sensitive to and aware of the child rights issue.

MATERIAL & METHOD

In this study, 2 five-degree, likert type scales consisting of the phrases relating to the awareness of the child rights convention and/or its contents and covering also some demographic features have been used. The scales are composed of 44 questions and also include 9 questions for the children and 7 questions for the adults to evaluate the demographic features. Both groups include 5 questions to evaluate the awareness of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The questionnaires have been applied to two groups: one composed of the children between 15 to 18 years old, and the other composed of the parent adults over 25. Although the questions in the scale applied to the children group are the same in terms of meaning and contents, several phrases have been changed to make them more easily understandable by the children. At the end of the questionnaires, there is a reminder saying, "if you have any ideas you want to share about this subject, please deliver them". The sample group is composed of 187 high school students selected randomly in Istanbul, and 132 adults with children, working in various jobs. It has been preferred intentionally from the developmental point of view to select the child group from the age group of 15 to 18 years old, considering that the youths who have acquired the abstract thinking ability can evaluate this subject including also abstract concepts better. The statistical processes have been performed using the package program SPSS 17.0.

FINDINGS

The **child sample group** is composed of 187 children and teenagers. Of the sample, 49.2% (n: 92) is composed of girls, 50.8% (n: 95) of boys. When we look at the **age group** of the children who have participated in the application, we see that 19.8% (n: 37) is fifteen-year-old, 43.3% (n: 81) sixteen-year-old, 29.4% (n: 55) seventeen-year-old, and 7.5% (n: 14) eighteen-year-old.

When we look at the **monthly total incomes** of the families of the sample group, we see that 75.9% (n: 142) has declared that they are included in the middle income group.

Of the group, **the parents** of 97.9% (n: 183) **are alive**, while 8.6% (n: 16) of the group has divorced parents, 2.1% (n: 4) has lost one of the parents.

When we look at the **sibling number** of the group, we see that 17.1% (n: 32) is the single child, 47.1% (n: 88) two siblings, and 35.8% (n: 67) three and more siblings. Among them, 43.9% (n: 82) is the youngest and 39.6% (n: 74) is the oldest child of the family.

Of the sample group, 69% (n: 129) has declared that they are **informed of the child rights convention**, while 31% (n: 58) that they are not. Of the sample, 24.1% (n: 45) has read the child rights convention, 75.9% (n: 142) have not.

When the child sample group has been asked whether the child rights convention is **applied in Turkey** or not, 56.1% said (n: 105) “yes”, 43.9% (n: 82) said “no”.

The **adult sample group** is composed of 132 persons.

Age: 72% of the sample group is female (n: 95), 28% male (n: 37), and the average age group is Min: 23, Max: 53 Std± 35.12.

Marital status: of the adult sample group, 89.4% (n: 118) is married, %10.6 (n: 14) single/widow.

When we look at the **educational status** of the sample group, 34.8% (n: 46) is high school graduate, 32.6% (n: 43) primary education graduate, 30.3% (n: 40) university graduate, and 2.3% (n: 3) is literate.

When we look at the **children number** of the sample group, 39.4% (n: 52) has 1 child, 41.7% (n: 55) 2 children, 10.6% (n: 14) 3 children, 7.6% (n: 10) 4 children, and 0.8% (n: 1) 5 children

When we look at the **monthly total income** of the sample group, 3% (n: 4) earns TL 750, 9.1% (n: 12) between TL 750 – 1000, 11.4% (n: 15) between TL 1000 – 1250, 18.9% (n: 25) TL 1250 – 1500, 22% (n: 29) between TL 1500 – 1750, and 35.6% (n: 47) TL 1750 and above.

Of the adult sample group, 56.8% (n: 75) has declared that they are **informed of the child rights convention**, while 43.2% (n: 57) that they are not. Of the sample group, 23.5% (n: 31) has read the child rights convention, while 76.5% (n: 101) has not.

When the adult sample group has been asked whether the child rights convention is **applied in Turkey** or not, 52.3% said (n: 69) “yes”, 47.7% (n: 63) said “no”.

Table 1: CRC Awareness

	YES	NO	TOTAL
Child	129 (69%)	58 (31%)	187

Adult	75 (56.8%)	57 (43.2%)	132
Total	204 (63.4%)	115 (36.05%)	319

Table 2: Reading CRC

	YES	NO	TOTAL
Child	45 (24.1%)	142 (75.9%)	187
Adult	31 (23.5%)	101 (76.5%)	132
Total	76 (28.8%)	243 (76.2%)	319

Table 3: Application of CRC in Turkey

	YES	NO	TOTAL
Child	105 (56.1%)	82 (43.9%)	187
Adult	69 (52.3%)	63 (47.7%)	132
Total	174 (54.5%)	145 (45.5%)	319

The answers given to 44 items in the likert type scale in the third part of the questionnaire have been evaluated under three headings: 1) the general provisions relating to the Convention on the Rights of the Child accepted by Turkey and applied globally, 2) the items that cover all countries that has signed the convention, thus Turkey too, but have no expressions with a special emphasis on Turkey, and 3) the views on application of these general provisions in Turkey. Under the 1st heading, the views relating to the general provisions relating to the Convention on the Rights of the Child have been asked. The first one of them is the phrase “**every person is considered to be child until the age of 18**”. For this basic phrase, both the children and the adults said “totally agree” by 40.1% (n=75) and 62.9% (n=83) respectively. *The phrase “the primary education is compulsory and free for every child”*: For this basic phrase, both the children and the adults said “totally agree” by 64.2% (n=122)

and 59.1% (n=78) respectively. *The phrase “**the children may not be employed in a manner detrimental to their education in Turkey**”: the adults said “agree” by 28.8% (n=38).*

*The adults have declared that they agree the phrase “**the children are not subject to discrimination due to their or their parents’ races, colors, genders, languages, ideas, etc.**” by 28% (n=37). For the phrase “**every child’s right to develop his/her own ideas and select his/her religion is respected**”, the children said “totally agree” %29.9 (n=54), while the adults said “agree” by 37.9% (n=50).*

DISCUSSION

CRC Article-42: States Parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike [3]. The fact that the “awareness” and internalization level constituting the basis of the works done on this subject is yet to be completed in our country makes the permanent and developing applications impossible. To the question “Do you know that the Convention on the Rights of the Child” has become a law and come into force in our country” in a questionnaire carried out in Turkey Child Summit website, of 60 participants, 58.3% (35) replied by “Yes, I do”, %12 (12) “No, I don’t”, and 11% (7) “I have never heard of it”.

*In our study, for the phrase “**every person is considered to be child until the age of 18**”, both the children and the adults said “totally agree” by 40.1% (n=75) and 62.9% (n=83) respectively. Such low rates indicate that even this basic phrase is not completely known by the children and the adults. Besides, the data in Table 1 and Table 2 also indicate the insufficiency of awareness and reading of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.*

We would like to emphasize some of the basic phrases:

- *For the phrase “**the primary education is compulsory and free for every child**”, both the children and the adults said “totally agree” by 64.2% (n=122) and 59.1% (n=78) respectively.*

In the Republic of Turkey, all citizens attend the primary education compulsorily. This is under the protection of laws. The paid status of the primary education depends on the economic conditions of the country. For all these reasons, the questionnaire results indicate that the participants do not regard it as a right in spite of the convention and the legal basis.

- For the phrase **“the children may not be employed in a manner detrimental to their education in Turkey”**, the adults said “agree” by 28.8% (n=38).

This phrase indicates us that the adults know that the children in Turkey are employed in a manner detrimental to their education. Additionally, the children have expressed their awareness of the issue by replying this question with “totally agree” by 29.4% (n: 55).

- The adults have declared that they agree the phrase **“the children are not subject to discrimination due to their or their parents’ races, colors, genders, languages, ideas, etc.”** by 28% (n=37). This ratio indicates that the adults in Turkey think that their children have been subjected to discrimination due their races, colors, genders, languages, ideas, etc.
- For the phrase **“every child’s right to develop his/her own ideas and select his/her religion is respected”**, the children said “totally agree” %29.9 (n=54), while the adults said “agree” by 37.9% (n=50).

Such low ratios indicate that the children and the adults are indecisive about thought, faith, and religion selections.

It is insufficient that the rights or the child are known by the children only [4]. The parents, the teachers, all adults, and the entire society must know the, and makes efforts so that all rights are implemented. The biggest responsibility on this subject belongs to the state. And the state is liable to keep its promises to the children [5]. It is unthinkable that a society that does not protect its children can have a bright future. The children who are the adults of the future deserve any rights exceedingly. The adverse conditions imposed by the social inequalities are not the children’s destiny. They must be taught of all rights they have, and equipped with a culture of sustainable fight against the social inequalities. The value given to the children is also a prerequisite for the society to protect its own future [4]. The conventions are notions that have a meaning only when they are applied. According to the results of the awareness test Polat has made with the medicine and law students who are engaged with the subject deeply and repeats every year, the rate of awareness does not reach 25% even for this group working with the children very closely [5]. One of the first things the Convention on the Rights of the Child signatory countries must do is to raise the awareness on this issue by introducing the convention to as large masses as possible. As also specified in the Child’s View Report 2010 in which the views of 6230 children between 9 to 18 years of age, delivered during the 1st

Turkey Child Rights Congress held 21 years after ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, our child rights culture level is very weak in terms of asking the views of the children considering the studies made, reports and books published on this subject since 1995 [6]. Of those answering the question "Do you have any information about the Convention on the Rights of the Child? Do you know you have rights?" among the questions of the study in the year 2010, only 5% said, "I've got sufficient information" [7], [8].

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