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Analyzing “Child” Stories in Cyprus Newspaper Regarding the “Child Image in Cyprus Culture”

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Abstract

Child is one of the most sensitive issues of societies and states in all around the world. Also, “childhood” is such a stage of life that arouses the interest of every segment of society. News about child in the press arouses more interest compared to other topics of news. The “newsworthiness” of news about child sometimes brings about the phenomenon of child abuse in media. What is more, the content and quality of news about child in the press give important clues regarding the value and status of child within society. For this reason, in this research it was aimed to study the content of news about child in the press in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The research reviewed 4 national newspapers with largest circulation, everyday between March 2012 and May 2012. The news were analyzed according to the region of the country; if the news source is domestic or from abroad; the topic of the news; target group of the news; the content of the message (positive/negative); and, type and category of the news. Content analysis was applied to the collected data. According to the analysis results, the topics of the news are mainly about education, culture-art, and social solidarity-charity, and news with negative message are generally about child abuse. Findings of the research were analyzed according to the way they reflect child’s status and value in society in Cypriot culture.

Keywords: Child in the press, child culture, the value of child, child in Cypriot culture;

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1. Introduction

The perception of childhood is different in every period of history and in every society. This is caused by the fact that "childhood" is a cultural product. Child is a gift of nature; yet the image of child is something created by the human being. The image of child defined education applications in every period of the history. The duty of a child educator is to fight against unsound images threatening the little child's healthy education (Elkind, 1999). Childhood is a period in which physical, emotional, cognitive, and social developments are rapidly continuing. That's why child needs special protection. Protection is one of the fundamental rights of a child. Media has an important role as a factor setting the agenda about issues related to human rights and especially child rights. Acting sensitively about rights is one of the most important responsibilities of media. Article 17 of the United Nations Convention on Child Rights clearly proves the responsibilities of mass medium in terms of child rights. Child Rights, which cover a major area within the human rights, come to the fore as a frequently analyzed and followed topic (Atay, 2009).

Analyzing the content of news about "child" in the press is at the same time an indicator/reflection of how child is discussed in terms of society.

News about child in the press arouses more interest compared to other topics of news; and, the "newsworthiness" of news about child sometimes brings about the phenomenon of child abuse in media. In addition, the content and quality of news about child in the press give important clues regarding the value and status of child within society.

2. Method

Analyzing the content of news about "child" in the press is at the same time an indicator/reflection of how child is discussed in terms of society. For this reason, in this research it was aimed to study the content of news about child in the press in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The research reviewed 4 national newspapers with largest circulation, everyday between March 2012 and May 2012. The news were analyzed according to the region of the country; the news source if it is domestic or from abroad; the topic of the news; target group of the news; the direction of the message (positive/negative); and, type and category of the news. Content analysis was applied to the collected data.

3. Findings

It was determined that among the categories defined as a result of the content analysis of the news based on child, most frequently culture and art news "about child" take part, at the rate of 35.6%. It was also determined that the rate of education related news is 28.6%; sport news is 9.4%; news about child neglect and abuse-violence against children is 9%; news about community service-charity is 8.7%; and, health related news is 8.7% respectively.

Considering the content of the messages of the news, it was determined that 85% are positive, while 15% are negative. Some of the news quotes taking place under the news categories, can be listed as, "Children will introduce their villages" (through the activities that children prepared, they try to stop migration from villages and ensure a return to the village); "children planted olive trees"; "children made an organic garden in Zümrütköy İ.Ö.O within the framework of EU grants, and grew healthy vegetables. They called their garden, "vitamin garden". "Children eat properly from the garden they grow"; "Vocational high school students performed singing games, drama, puppet shows, dances, and clown shows to kids"; "Azerbaijan Children's Theatre is in Cyprus Ataturk Primary School"; "Cyprus music, art, and ballet school gave a concert in sister schools in Germany and the United States"; "college students explained milk and its benefits to primary school children"; "the music association established by high school students organizes 8th Bellapais music festival"; "bookmarker design contest"; "children

festivals"; "remarkable donation to the SOS. Scout groups aging between 7 and 14 donated the income that they made from a charity fair, in which they sold the products made by their parents"; "Schools pedaled, bike races"; "kids sweat at the volleyball court, primary school volleyball tournament". "Sixteen year olds are forced to work"; "siblings with 6 and 7 fingers cannot go to school due to health conditions"; "lost finger for being delayed at the hospital for ten hours"; "missing Mustafa's murderer is his own father"; "community rooted for the woman who had to left house due to domestic violence"; "more than a thousand children under 16 committed crime in last three years in Southern Cyprus"; these are examples of some news.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The way of perceiving children always reflects a cultural and historical perspective (Elkind, 2001). Although today theoretical approaches regarding children are promising, and laws particularly about child rights that are protecting children all over the world were enacted; still, most of these laws can not be implemented, or at least, the proper conditions for all children can not be maintained. Childhood is a social construction.

It is necessary to see childhood as a variable of social analysis differing interculturally; rather than a unique and universal image of childhood (James & Prout, 1997).

Today parents care for their children much more than past; they dedicate themselves to raise their children properly and give them happiness. Yet this is not the case for all children.

In many studies it is reported that individuals with higher socio-economical status behave more properly in terms of child development (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005). Protection of child requires not only the family but also the responsibility of society.

Children's social relations and culture are worth studying independent from adult's perspective. Children are effective in terms of establishing and determining their own social life. Childhood is not the same in everywhere and every time; a universal nature of child, outside historical and cultural aspects, is not possible (Onur, 2007).

The value of child is at the same time a precondition of a society to claim its own future. The fact that child is represented, fascinated, as an object of consumption/desire; as criminal and sufferer; and stigmatized by media, which causes to social stigmatization and isolation, revoke the child's right to be child. For example, a child who is stigmatized as "thief" in media, will not be able to go to school, perhaps he will feel humiliated in front of his friends and teachers for a crime that he did not commit (Mora,2008). As a sample study regarding the problem how children are represented in mass medium, content analysis was conducted on children news published in "Star", "Akşam" and "Hürriyet" newspapers between 12 July and 12 August. This news was analyzed according to the following questions:

In a study about how children are represented in mass medium, by Mora (2008), it was determined that out of 128, 114 news were about child victimization. The child is perpetrator in 6 of the news. The number of news about celebrities' children is, 6. There is one success news. There is one news about child, in general. Apart from violence perpetrators, children are passive in the news; they are represented as the ones who are exposed to violence, or hurt in a disaster, accident, or tragedy. Likewise, in education-related news they are victims because of the system; or incorrect question, incorrect score calculation etc. In health news children are represented as ill, victim. Within the hierarchy of news, news generally focus on children exposed to power/violence –rape, beating, accident, disaster, being bereaved, suffer of an illness, malpractice, wrong medical operations, and being left for not being able to afford the hospital bills. In addition, low income group children and girls are represented as victims of violence, accident, illness, tragedy etc. As a result, it can be argued that income level and gender factors are important indicators in terms of being represented in media. Considering the classification of income level, children of civil servants and artisans are referred to be in the

group of mid class; while children of workers and pitchmen are referred to be in low income group; and children of celebrities and famous people are referred to be in high income group.

In another study analyzing news about children published in four national newspapers in Turkey in 2005, it was determined that children mostly take their place as victims of crime/violence (% 24,9). It is also mentioned that the rate of tragedies like disaster or accident is very high 15.8%. The least frequently referred topic about children is child labor (0.5%). It was argued that even the rate of news about children of celebrities is 5.1%. The rate of news about education and homeless children was only 1% more than the news about children of celebrities (Şirin, 2011). Atay (2009) aimed to reveal the approaches regarding child and childhood in child-based news published in newspapers, which are considered to represent the Islamic press. In that research it was mentioned that child-centered news are underconsidered and less cared for compared to other news; also, the existing news are generally health oriented, which in fact stems from the necessity of considering child health in Turkey. Same research indicated that of all the news, 31.4% are about child abuse and neglect; in 34.6% of these news pictures of children were used; while 26.3% use clear identity of children.

Another research (Perry et al., 1999) studied child news in media. This document summarizes a study of news coverage of children in national media in 1994 and reports on the follow-up conducted in 1998. The follow-up study was based on a sample of national news coverage collected throughout 1998 from five major newspapers and three broadcast networks. The findings of the 1994 study led to the conclusion that although news coverage of children was substantial, it was not balanced. Among the key findings of the follow-up study were the following: child-related newspaper stories increased 37% over 5 years while television coverage remained unchanged; the proportion of child-related news stories involving crime/violence dropped considerably, the proportion involving cultural/health issues increased considerably, and family/economic issues continued to account for the smallest number of stories; children's voices were twice as common on television news as in newspapers; both media provided very little practical information for parents in child-related news stories; about 20% of stories addressed public policy concerns, down slightly from 1993; children of color received little coverage, with African-Americans receiving more coverage than all others combined; and stories about children of color focused on education more than crime/violence.

In this research, contrary to the research results mentioned above, it is indicated that in Cyprus media most of the news about child protect the "value" of child; and child is generally discussed within the contexts of education, culture, art, sport; which positively influence child development. These results can be evaluated as a positive asset in terms of value of child in Cyprus. On the other hand, one other interesting finding of the study is that children also take place in advertising, promotion and announcement oriented news. Media is an important power in child-related topics, and it has an important responsibility. According to ethical principles determined by UNICEF regarding child rights, every child has the right to have an honorable life and be respected in all conditions. While interviewing children and making news about them, it is necessary to be attentive to every child's right of private life and privacy; the right to express views; and the right of protection from harm and punishment, even though it is potential. Advocating and promoting child rights, which are the utmost benefits of every child, should be prioritized (Gencel, 2011).

Child Right Information Network (CRIN) mentioned that when making news about children and referring to ethical principles, one should refrain from question, attitude, and comments that are judging, senseless to cultural values, humiliating the child, or reinvigorating pain and sorrow regarding traumatic events (İnceoğlu & Akmer, 2011). Every behavior of human being is affected by the culture within he lives. For this reason, studies discussing child within culture are of vital importance in terms of determining the values and social perception of child within the culture he improves. These studies will also function as pioneering activities setting light to policies and projects that will be developed for child.

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