


Chapter 20

Representation of Syrian Children in Turkish Media From a Child–Oriented Rights Journalism Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The starting point of this study is to reveal how Syrian children, who are still experiencing a vexed problem in Turkey and are thought to affect our immediate future, are represented in the newspapers. The most frequently used themes were identified in the news through qualitative content analysis, and by means of discourse analysis method, it was aimed to reveal the representations produced through discourses. The subject has been discussed from an interdisciplinary and critical perspective. It was an important finding in the news about these children that there is a lack of emphasis concerning children's rights and the perspective of children's rights which was stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), to which Turkey is a party. Although the lack of a rights-based perspective in the news in the study is notable, journalism guidelines respecting children's rights should be the basic principle in preparing news about children in general and Syrian children in particular.

INTRODUCTION

In our world, children are the most affected group by negative conditions such as socio-economic problems, war, and migration; as a result of these problems, the basic needs of children cannot be met, and they have to face various injustices. Although the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), to which Turkey is a party today, protects the human rights of the child, Syrian children, who make up half of Syrian refugees in Turkey, face many problems such as health, housing, social security, discrimination, inability to access to education, sexual abuse, and child labour.

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As in cases of war and conflict, in the case of migration, the media influences the public with the meanings it produces when representing events and persons. The focus of concerns about this effect is the probability that the media can circulate more persistent and hard-to-correct prejudices through the representations and discourses produced. Since discourse has an impact beyond being an impartial tool for people to express their thoughts or portray events, language produced in the media directly affects social life, heightens tensions in society, and increases polarization. The discourse, which can be evaluated in the historical and social context of its time, not only affects the way people are interpreting a particular information or situation, but also their positioning against it (van Dijk, 2010, s. 16). The media plays an important role in shaping the general perception of immigrants in the countries receiving immigration. In addition, the media can influence public opinion on immigrants, while at the same time setting the agendas of politicians. In case the children, who can only find very little coverage in the media and who are represented in quite incomplete and incorrect ways, are refugees or immigrants, they still more lose their rights.

As of October 31, 2019, Turkey is hosting approximately 4 million refugees, 3,680,603 of whom are Syrians, according to the Directorate General of Migration Management of the Turkish Ministry of Interior. Only 1.71% (62,673 people) of Syrian refugees stayed in camps set up in border cities; the remaining 98.29% (3,617,930 people) live scattered throughout various cities. This makes Syrians an important social subject in Turkish public opinion, placing them at the center of numerous debates. Nearly half of Syrian population in Turkey (1,726,044 people) are children between 0-18. Given these rates, it is particularly important how refugees living in cities access basic services such as health or education (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of the Syrian Children living in Turkey within the context of temporary protection

Age Range	Boy	Girl	Total
0-4	294,834	275,402	570,236
5-9	254,923	240,100	495,023
10-14	199,966	185,029	384,995
15-18	151,977	123,813	275,790
Total	901,700	824,344	1,726,044

(Turkish Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Migration Management, 11.08.2019)

Turkish authorities have an obligation to guarantee the children's right to education in all places under its jurisdiction in accordance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the United Nations CRC. This obligation shall be imposed on all children in Turkey free of charge or without discrimination based on their status as a refugee or asylum seeker, or any other legal status, or the legal status of the children's parents or guardians (Amnesty International, 2009). Today, the problem of education for Syrian children remains a crucial problem. The Ministry of National Education (MNE) has made some arrangements since 2013, aiming to find a solution for the education problem of Syrian refugees. The MNE circular on the access of foreigners to education, published in September 2014, provided education services for foreigners under temporary protection in a certain standard and secured their access to education through the schools and temporary education centers supervised by the

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