



EVALUATING LEVELS OF RESPECT FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS SHOWED TOWARDS FEMALES FROM 18 TO 25 IN THEIR CHILDHOOD

Mehmet Şaban Akgül¹

Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University,
Reşadiye Vocational School,
Department of Child Care and Youth Services,
Turkey

orcid.org/0000-0002-7257-5458

Abstract:

The current study aimed to evaluate levels of respect for children's rights showed towards females from 18 to 25 in their childhood, and to interpret their expectations and opinions. Data were collected with open-ended questions in written and qualitatively content-analyzed. The participants were 67 females ranging in age from 18 to 25 from 24 provinces in Turkey. The participants' statements showed that they felt special and unique in their childhood, their relatives and close others were not allowed to caress them without their consent, they were asked for opinions in matters that concerned them, and their parents gave them the opportunity to spend their free time as they wished. The most valued child rights by the participants were right to play, rest, and spend their free time, right to freedom of expression and thought, and right to receive education. What they did not find the chance to do although they wanted very much were being a child, sightseeing, becoming a family, and being into sports. On the other hand, there were also participants who stated that they could not find the chance to spend their free time as they wished because they had to work, and they were caressed by others without their consent. Considering the results, it may be suggested that the rights of the child be respected and valued more, and various public services, seminars and instructions be made for raising more awareness.

Keywords: the rights of the child, respect for the rights of the child, education for the rights of the child, right to spend free time and playing

1. Introduction

Children matter more than any other individuals in the world. They are also regarded as hope and assurance for future. Childhood is a critical period in lifetime in that it plays

¹ Correspondence: email mehmet.akgul@gop.edu.tr

significant roles in shaping adulthood (Council of Europe, 2017). Early childhood is especially very important in character development. A well-grown child of today can be a light to future's society.

One of the evident indicators of an advanced-culture society is that it values children and creates opportunities for them to grow up consciously (Miller & Catherine, 1999). A maturing and developing child requires laws that ensures his/her place in family and society. If children are grown up unconsciously without their requirements met and if they are deprived of their rights, they can be easily oppressed by their parents, teachers, employers, that is, by older and stronger people than them. Such an oppressed individual is not expected to properly grow up and develop. Therefore, child's act is a crucial matter (Serozan, 2005). Children's both physical and mental development depend on the fact that they should be grown up in a lovely and democratic family. Raising children and ensuring their protection and development are parents' primary responsibility. Child's act is the totality of principles that regulate children's in-family and social relationships, and it is the duty of governments to ensure that parents must execute their responsibilities for their children.

Governments are also in charge of ensuring protection and implementation of the rights of the child and provide modifications when needed (Gözübüyük, 2008). People's improvement in communication skills and self-expression depend on certain variables (Akgül & Yavuzer, 2019). While children's deficiency of self-protection and defense are known by every section of the society, some sections do not recognize children as individuals. This clearly shows how important child's act is. Child's act is rather delicate and if neglected, it may cause philosophical, ethical and social problems (Rodham, 1973). Expressions of child's act have been distinctly examined, variously categorized and differently interpreted. Akyüz (2018) states that child's act, one of the chapters of human rights, is akin to human rights in essence. Child's act should be more attentively discussed since children are individuals requiring delicate protection.

Acknowledged in 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was formed to encompass protection, development and basic rights of children. According to the Convention, every individual under 18 have these rights without discriminated on the grounds of their races, beliefs and physical conditions, opinions and statements, and irrespective of where they come from. The convention charges nations responsibilities of ensuring protection and fostering of all children's rights. Signed in 1990, the convention was implemented in 1995 in Turkey (Ardıç Çobaner, 2015).

Protecting children and their rights, which is an indicator of prosperity and peace in society, is one of the major questions in the world. If children in a society are exhausted, neglected, and abused both physically and mentally, that society will be underdeveloped in all senses. On the contrary, if children are individuated, valued and given the chance of healthy development, then the society may be deemed developing or developed.

It is necessary to investigate the circumstances of all the children in the world to be able to assert that they truly have their rights. Every society has its own questions

about children. A review on children's problems in societies has shown that children are not properly embraced, they are abused and left in poverty, creating social inequalities. On the other hand, social stability, positive family affairs and struggling to do the best for children can be counted as positive sides. Nevertheless, political stress, detrimental traditions, high social and economic injustices are also encountered (UNICEF, 2006). All these indicate that level of having children's rights in childhood is considered vital in terms of future of societies.

2. Aim and Scope

The current study aimed to evaluate levels of respect for children's rights showed towards females from 18 to 25 in their childhood. The study is expected to be significant in evaluating the rights of the child, parents' respect for these rights, and set an example for taking concrete steps accordingly.

3. Method

3.1 Design

The current study was designed and conducted with qualitative research method. A qualitative research is generally preferred for deeper exploration of a specified subject (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Singh, 2007; Patton, 2014). Designed in phenomenological research, the data of the current study were collected with the interview technique and content-analyzed. Phenomenological design focuses on subjects for thorough exploration (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). In phenomenology, researchers enquire into participants' thoughts, conceptions, perceptions and expectations. Phenomenology is not generalizing but descriptive (Baş & Akturan, 2008).

3.2 Participants

The current study was conducted with 67 voluntary female undergraduates, ranging in age from 18 to 25, from 24 randomly selected provinces in Turkey. Table 1 displays the participants' demographics.

Table 1: Demographics

	Frequency	Per cent
Age		
18	3	4.5
19	11	16.4
20	19	28.4
21	18	26.9
22	9	13.4
23	3	4.5
24	2	3
25	2	3

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Have you read the Convention on the Rights of the Child?		
Yes	44	65.7
Partially	10	14.9
No	13	19.4
Mother's educational background		
Not literate	8	11.9
Primary School	38	56.7
Elementary School	8	11.9
High School	10	14.9
University	3	4.5
Father's educational background		
Not literate	1	1.5
Primary School	23	34.3
Elementary School	24	35.8
High School	14	20.9
University	5	7.5
Place of residence in childhood		
Province	21	31.3
County	26	38.8
Village	14	20.9
Miscellaneous	6	9
Total	67	100

3.3 Measures

After the literature review, a draft form, comprised of 7 open-ended questions, was developed and performed on 60 undergraduates for pilot study. Considering the pilot study results, the draft form was finalized as being comprised of 6 open-ended questions with feedback from 4 lecturers and 4 teachers.

3.4 Data Collection

Data of "evaluating levels of respect for children's rights showed towards females from 18 to 25 in their childhood" and demographics were gathered via Google Forms with necessary approvals taken from the ethics committee.

3.5 Procedure

Data were analyzed with descriptive and content analysis. Participants were coded as F1, F2, F3 etc. Categories, codes and numbers extracted from the data analyses were elaborately displayed in tables and some findings were directly cited without any modifications so as to provide internal consistency.

4. Results

The participants' statements about the question "Did you use to feel special and unique at home and among close others in your childhood (under 18)?" were first coded and then categorized. Table 2 displays the related information.

Table 2: Participants' statements about if they felt special and unique in their childhood

Code	Category	N
I was a pretty child and used to grab people's attention.	Yes	5
The whole family cared about me a lot.		8
They cared about my needs and problems.		4
I am the youngest.		8
I am the first child.		14
I am the only child.		4
Our family bond and communication were very strong.		13
I grew up in a large family.	No	4
My parents were oblivious and were not cared by their parents.		4
I grew up in a male-focused neighborhood.		3
My parents did not use to care about me.		4
I was affected by economical inadequacies.		2
Everyone used to gather for me on my birthday.	Partially	3
They mostly supported me in problems that I was not able to overcome.		2
I only felt special when I became successful and ill.		2
Neither my father nor my mother cared about me.		2

As observed in Table 2, three categories were created as yes, no and partially basing on the participants' statements about if they felt unique and special in their childhood at home and among close others. 56 statements referred to yes while 17 statements indicated no, and 9 statements referred to partially. Hence, most of the female participants may be said to have felt special and unique in their childhood. Some of the participants' statements are as follows:

"We are a five-member family. I have a brother and a sister. I am the youngest. Most people around me say that I am luckier and more special compared to my brother and sister, but I do not agree. I could not spend enough time with them since I am 13 and 10 years younger than them. I started primary school while they were going to college. We had education together with a low family income. I witnessed my parents struggle alone at home. I do not think that I am special considering my sacrifice for my siblings." (F8)

"Yes, I felt special. I usually felt special on my birthdays by my parents and intimate friends. Besides, I also felt special thanks to the people who were with me in my hard times. It feels so good to know that you are cared by the people around." (F17)

"I felt special in childhood by my parents and close others because I was the youngest of three, and my parents used to and still tell me that I am the last and the source of joy in the family. The reason why I felt special is that my parents have always struggled for their children to present us a quality life. They struggled in my childhood and they still do so. One of the other reasons why I was cared by my parents and close others is that I was always cheerful and positive. I immediately cheer them up if they are down; it was the same in my childhood. My parents always cherish us. Even the people in my neighborhood made me feel unique." (F59)

The participants' statements about the question "Could your close relatives caress you whenever they wanted without your consent in your childhood (under 18)?" were first coded and then categorized. Table 3 displays the related information.

Table 3: Participants' statements about if their relatives could caress them without their consent

Code	Category	N
They say I was a very pretty baby.	Yes	2
My family were unconscious.		11
The people around were not respectful in this matter.		8
My family were conscious and sensible in this matter.	No	12
I was aggressive and distant since I did not like to be touched.		21
The people around were respectful.		5
I grew up in a loveless place.		4
My family were discreet in this matter but not our close relatives.	Partially	6

As observed in Table 3, three categories were created as yes, no and partially basing on the participants' statements about if close others could caress them without their consent. 21 statements referred to yes while 42 statements indicated no, and 6 statements referred to partially. Thus, most of the female participants may be said not to have liked being caressed and by their relatives without consent. Some of the participants' statements are as follows:

"No, because I had a considerate family to always tell me to be careful. My mother told me that I should not let others touch my private parts except for her and my father, and I knew that I should not have avoided telling her if such things happened. We had a large family and my mother took care of housework. Therefore, it was my father who mostly cared for us because he was unemployed. He was at home all the time since he was visually impaired. My first friend was my father. He always warned me about this. He taught me that I should not let anyone touch me without my consent, and since I grew up with this regard, I let no one but intimates touch me." (F26)

"I think people were allowed to touch and kiss me because of the way we were raised and of our culture though I did not approve this. We were anyways taught as if we had to answer people's wish for touching and kissing us even if we did not want. However, as we grew up, we realized that this was not true and now we can keep people away from us." (F33)

"Yes, they used to touch and kiss me although my mother did not approve this at all. I was always upset about this and always tried to keep them away. Now I never touch any children without their consent. I am conscious of this enough." (F54)

The participants' statements about the question "Did your family use to ask your opinion in matters that concerned you?" were first coded and then categorized. Table 4 displays the related information.

Table 4: Participants' statements about if their parents asked for their opinions

Code	Category	N
There were respect and democracy at home.	Yes	28
The adult did not ask the young's opinions.	No	24
They formally asked me for my opinion, but the control was in their hands.	Partially	11
They sometimes asked for my opinion.		6
I insistently expressed my opinions.		2

Table 4 displays three categories as yes, no and partially regarding the participants' statements about if their opinions about the matters concerning them were asked for in their childhood. 28 statements referred to yes, 24 statements indicated no, and 19 statements referred to partially. Accordingly, most of the participants may be said not to have asked for their opinions in matters concerning them. Some of the participants views are as follows:

"Yes, they asked for my opinion. If I am now free to express myself, it is thanks to their respect to and consideration for my thoughts. My parents never ignored my opinions, they always cared about my views. This helped me have both confidence in them and become self-confident." (F9)

"No, they did not. My opinions were unimportant. They were the decision makers." F22

"It depended. When I was too little, I was not asked for opinions, only when choosing clothes. As I grew older, they began to ask for my opinions, or rather, I willingly expressed my opinions." (F67)

The participants' statements about the question "Did your family use to allow you to spend your free time as you wished?" were first coded and then categorized. Table 5 displays the related information.

Table 5: Participants' statements about the freedom of spending free time

Code	Category	N
I was conscious of my responsibilities, and my family respected me.	Yes	16
They used to allow me when they were sure it was safe.		7
They tried hard for me to be happy.		9
I used to get permission to go out and play.		10
My parents always used to tell me to study.	No	2
I grew up in a restricting and conservative place.		3
My family used to ask me to do housework, I could not live my childhood properly.		5
I grew up in a large family, I did not get enough care.		3
I was expected to do activities they wanted.		3

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They began to restrict me when I was in adolescence.		4
My mother had the anxiety about that the house could be messy.	Partially	3
My mother used to give me permission only if had I helped in housework.		2

Table 5 displays three categories created as yes, no and partially regarding the participants' statements about if their parents used to allow them to spend their free time in their childhood as they wished. 42 statements referred to yes, 16 statements indicated no, and 9 statements referred to partially. Accordingly, most of the participants may be said to have been allowed to spend their free time as they wished. Some of the participants views are as follows:

"They rarely allowed me to do this. Since I grew up in a large family, all family members had separate duties. Therefore, I did not always use to find the chance to spend my free time." (F11)

"I never used to have free time. I either used to do homework or took care of the poultry with the family." (F36)

"My parents used to allow me to do however I wished to spend my free time, and I liked spending it reading or playing with my toys that they bought for my free time." (F46)

The participants' statements about the question "What was the rights that you most valued in your childhood?" were first coded and then categorized. Table 6 displays the related information.

Table 6: Participants' statements about the children's rights that they most valued

Coded	Category	N
My parents did not care about me.	Right to be loved by family	2
I felt happy when they expressed their love.		2
The most essential need of a child is playing games.	Right to play, rest and spend free time	20
I would like to have felt that I was a child.		3
Children's special lives and free times should not be interfered.		2
Children should not be deprived of education.	Right to receive education	7
Girls should receive education, studying was a salvation for me.		3
Education is essential to have a prosperous life.		3
The educated grow consciously.		2
Right to live is fundamental.	Right to live	4
I would like to live freely.		5
I would like to think and express myself freely.	Right to freedom of expression and thought	8
I would like to make my own decisions.		5
I would like my opinions to be valued.		2
Children should not be discriminated because of their differences.	Right to protection from discrimination	2

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All children should benefit from rights to health and protection.	Other rights	2
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As seen in Table 6, seven categories, namely right to be loved by family, right to play, rest and spend free time, right to receive education, right to live, right to freedom of expression and thought, right to protection from discrimination, and other rights were created regarding the participants' statements about the rights that they most valued in their childhood. 4 statements referred to right to be loved by family, 25 statements indicated right to play, rest and spend free time, 15 statements referred to right to receive education, 9 statements pointed to right to live, 15 statements referred to right to freedom of expression and thought, 2 statements indicated right to protection from discrimination, and 2 statements referred to other rights. Thus, the most valued right may be said to be right to play, rest and spend free time. Some of the participants views are as follows:

“What I most valued was that my opinions and wishes were cared and heard. Seeing that my parents cared and asked me for my opinions made me happier than anything else.” (F7)

“What I most valued was my right to receive education because there are a lot of children deprived of this. It makes me feel really fortunate to have this right since I know there are children who have limited possibilities and do not have right to receive education.” (F34)

“I valued my right to play. I really loved playing and dancing. I especially enjoyed playing games with my mother. She used to be a kid with me.” (F60)

The participants' statements about the question “What was the most important thing that you did not find the chance to do although you wanted to do very much in your childhood (under 18)?” were first coded and then categorized. Table 7 displays the related information.

Table 7: Participants' statements about the things that they did not find the chance to do

Code	Category	N
I wish I had been able to play the guitar.	Playing a musical instrument	4
I wish I had been able to play baglama.		2
I wish I could have had the chance to go on holiday with my friends.	Sightseeing	2
I wish I could have had the chance to go out freely.		4
I wish I could have had the chance to join a school trip.		4
I wish I had been into a favorite sports branch.	Being into sports	7
I wish I had been able to become a volleyball player.		3
I wish I had mastered in visual arts.	Dreams	2
I would do anything to make my father gain his sight again.		1
I wish I could have seen my mother one last time before she passed away.		1
I never knew my father. I wish I had.		1
I wish I had spent quality time with my father.	Becoming	8

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I would like a strong family bond.	a family	3
I wish I could have enjoyed my childhood.	Living a true childhood	2
I wish I could have had a personal room.		2
I wish my family had not been too restrictive.		3
I wish I had got a pet.		3
I wish I could have had a bike.		7
I wish I could have had toys.		2
I would have liked to be listened unbiasedly.		2
I did everything I wished to do.	Peaceful childhood	4

Table 7 shows that 6 statements indicated the category playing a musical instrument, 10 statements referred to sightseeing, 10 statements pointed to being into sports, 5 statements implied dreams, 11 statements indicated becoming a family, 21 statements referred to being a child, and 4 statements implied peaceful childhood. Thus, the most important thing that they wished to have had in their childhood was being a child. Some of the participants' statements are as follows:

"I have enjoyed singing and listening to music since childhood. I admired the ones playing a musical instrument and they have always been an inspiration to me. I was into the electric guitar because I was impressed by the songs I listened to in my puberty. But its sound was somewhat unusual to some and I thought that the acoustic guitar would be better. I told my parents about my wish and they told me to play something else but I did not lose my will to play it. One day, my uncle came with a baglama on which my name was inscribed. I thanked him for that but this was not my will and I was discouraged. I wanted to play neither the guitar nor any other instruments from then on." (F1)

"There is one thing that I could not do in my childhood and still want to do, and that is the chance to spend one day with my father, a full day indeed." (F13)

"I wish I could have seen my mother one last time before she passed away. I lost her when I was 11. I cannot talk about anything else that I want more." (F51)

5. Conclusions, Discussion and Suggestions

Childhood is the most remembered and precious period of a lifespan, which leaves the most permanent marks on individuals. Children do not always have the chance to live out this period up to their wishes. Hence, families and close others have great responsibilities within this process. Positive and negative spots are mostly permanent for a lifespan, and memories are remembered with expressions of "I wish" or "fortunately." Care for the child is parallel to level of respect showed by others for the rights of the child. This level of respect is very valuable to children and dramatically affects their future life. In this respect, it is important to evaluate level of respect for the rights of the child.

Therefore, the current study presents authentic results in evaluating levels of respect for the rights of the child that females from 18 to 25 had in their childhood.

The results of whether the participants felt special and unique among their families and close others were affirmative because of the reasons like being the first child of the family and strong family bonds. A previous research by Eriksen and Debalkie (2019) has shown that one of the major obstacles to children's having their rights was conservative way of raising children. Parallely, Kozikoğlu (2019) found that children did not state that they felt special and unique because of being raised with negative family attitudes.

The results of whether participants' close relatives could caress them without their consent indicated that they did not allow to be caressed because of the reasons like families were sensitive and conscious of this matter and children were aggressive and distant when they did not want to be caressed. The participants stated that their opinions were mostly cared in matters that concerned them thanks to the democratic and respectful family ambiance. Their statements about whether their families allowed them to spend their free time as they wished also showed that the families were generally conscious and considerate of this because of the reasons like the participants were aware of their responsibilities, families were respectful towards them, they allowed them to go out if they were sure there was no danger, and they wanted to do as best they could to make them feel happy. Considering these results, the families and close others may be said to be respectful of and conscious of the rights of the child. Some studies on the level of consciousness of the rights of the child seem supportive of the current study results (Alderson, 1999; Taylor, Smith & Nairn, 2001).

What the participants most valued in their childhood were mostly right to play, rest, and spend free time, right to freedom of expression and thought and right to receive education. Similar to the results, Gültekin et al. (2016) found that the participants mostly mentioned right to receive education and right to play. Ersoy (2011) also found in his study that the participants mostly mentioned right to receive education, to play and to spend free time. Besides, Howe and Covell (1999) found that right to protection was the most mentioned.

What the participants did not find the chance to do although they wanted very much were being a child, sightseeing, becoming a family and being into sports. Besides the current study results, Gültekin et al. (2016) found that violence and lack of love and respect were the obstacles to the rights of the child. Ersoy (2011), on the other hand, noted that undergraduates' wishes and expectations were love, respect and care.

Following suggestions may be made in addition to the current study results:

- The study is limited to 67 female participants from 24 provinces in Turkey. Further studies may be done with more participants (male and females) from all provinces in Turkey. Level of respect that both genders had for children's rights in childhood may be compared and contrasted.
- The participants of the current study range in age from 18 to 25. Age range can be broadened to produce comparative results.

- The study is limited to 6 open-ended questions. Number of open-ended questions can be increased.
- The results may be guiding to everyone in how children should be treated, and in showing respect towards their rights.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author

Dr. Mehmet Şaban Akgül is an Assistant Professor at Department of Child Care and Youth Services at Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University, he got his doctoral degree from Ondokuzmayıs University, Institute of Educational Sciences in 2018. His doctoral dissertation titled "The definition of the consciousness level of 3rd and 4th grade primary school students about child rights: A scale development work". His research interests are: preschool education, child development, classroom education, personal development, children's rights, teaching, inclusion education, classroom management.

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