FOREIGN COUNTRY EXPERIENCES IN ORGANIZING SOCIAL WORK WITH CHILDREN FROM VULNERABLE GROUPS

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Abstract

The paper deals with the problems of the children who belong to vulnerable groups are one of the pressing issues of the present time. This group includes children with various psychological, intellectual, and physical disabilities, as well as those who face limitations in overall development. They may also be deprived of the opportunity to live independently, lack parental care, require social assistance and protection, and experience discrimination based on their cultural or ethnic background, among other challenges. Based on foreign country experiences, social work aims to reduce the deprivation or harm to children belonging to vulnerable groups in the environment they live in, and to provide them with happiness, health, and educational opportunities. These experiences rely on various methods, programs, and events with the purpose of recognizing the needs of children in vulnerable groups, ensuring health, environmental suitability, and psychosocial support, improving their quality of life, and realizing their potentials.

Keywords

Vulnerable group, social work, children, socialization, foreign country experiences.

1. Introduction

Children with disabilities or limited health abilities who are included in the sensitive group face barriers in their ability to perform self-care, mobility, communication, self-control, as well as in their capacity to receive education and engage in activities. All these barriers result in a lack of self-esteem, social adaptation difficulties, the absence of infrastructure adequacy, and other problems that need to be addressed and supported.

Vulnerable groups are the most affected by inequality in society. While social inequalities lead to numerous health problems among these groups, they also hinder their access to fundamental rights such as shelter, nutrition, and healthcare. Vulnerable groups include people with disabilities, the elderly, children, ethnic minorities, individuals with mental illnesses, homeless individuals, and refugees. People with low socioeconomic status are also included among vulnerable groups (Soner & Avci, 2019; Ekmekçi, 2017). The concept of vulnerable individuals and states is not a new phenomenon. Highlighting the difficulties of international development within the framework of vulnerability is a departure from the norm. We believe that the focus on vulnerability clarifies the conceptualization and implementation of international development assistance (Bromley & Anderson, 2012).

An important consideration regarding sensitive groups is the incomplete definition or assessment of sensitivity. There are other factors broadening the definition of sensitive groups. One of them is innate and acquired conditions. Anxiety disorders, Alzheimer's,

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autism, and low self-esteem can be cited as examples of these conditions. Other factors include environmental factors that are independent of the individual (Yavuz, 2019). However, imaginings and biases towards the society or group one belongs to can also lead to sensitivity. Homelessness, discrimination, sex work, suffering from war, and targeted isolation policies towards specific groups can serve as examples of this (Brule & Eckstein, 2017: 1873). Providing information about the delivery of public services can help to ensure the suitability of these services by attracting people to participate in joint research. However, sensitive groups often systematically remain deprived of these activities (Julia A & Joanna S., 2021). The authors propose participating in local and international experiential conferences that provide a platform for researchers, interns, and members of vulnerable groups to exchange ideas and engage in mutual learning, with the aim of further developing the current practices of collaborative production of research on providing public services (Mulvale *et al.,* 2019).

In many foreign countries, programs and trainings are organized for those who work with vulnerable children. These trainings and programs are very effective in finding solutions to their problems. Programs are organized by professionals in various fields and help trainees make changes in the lives of vulnerable individuals. Additionally, researching the problems of vulnerable children and learning different methods and experiences in this field is an ideal opportunity. These experiences allow children to meet people from different cultures and life experiences, enriching their worldview and helping them to look at different aspects of life from a broader perspective.

2. Different approaches in the organization of social work with children belonging to the vulnerable group

Children are undergoing rapid development and change. Teachers and caregivers, as well as parents, play a leading role in meeting their physical, intellectual, and emotional needs both at school and in the family. Children's social skills may remain unfulfilled due to various reasons. In order for them to realize these knowledge and skills, it is necessary to assess children and provide them with opportunities in every field.

Family and child issues hold an important place in the activities of international organizations and countries around the world. Foreign experiences in organizing social work with children in sensitive groups are very useful. One of the most important issues is the psychological condition of children. In this regard, countries such as Scandinavia and Japan pay great attention to the health and spirituality of children. Social work organizations in these countries provide consultation and support to children, families, and parents by experienced and specialist staff. The support provided plays a very important role in the health and psychological condition of children.

In Turkiye, many children, especially belonging to vulnerable groups, continue to face violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect despite positive advancements. UNICEF's activities in Turkiye target various vulnerable groups of children who are at risk of falling behind due to a range of protection issues (Child Protection | UNICEF).

Many countries are resorting to innovative experiences to provide better education for children. For example, countries like Finland and Japan focus their education programs on fostering children's creativity and research skills. These programs are specifically designed for sensitive groups and aim to unleash their maximum potential. However, there are also differences among countries in terms of the social inclusion of children from sensitive groups. Some allow children to spend most of their time at home,

while others provide opportunities for their active participation in the community environment.

There are several different ways to gain social work experience with vulnerable groups of children in Turkiye. Those who wish to work with these children generally have backgrounds in social work, psychology, education, or work in child homes, child centers, social welfare organizations, or organizations focused on vulnerable groups. People working in these places can establish close relationships with children belonging to vulnerable groups and meet their social, educational, and psychological needs. The most important aspect is for individuals working with vulnerable groups to have patience, understanding, and experience in order to comprehend their needs and problems. These are essential tools for working with children belonging to vulnerable groups.

The organization of social work with children belonging to vulnerable groups In Turkiye is carried out by various organizations, institutions, and programs. This process requires extensive experience and specialized knowledge, ranging from the organization of broad and direct social work to group therapy and exercise training in centers, and from teachers' instructions to psychological support. To support children in Turkiye, there are many social organizations and institutions. Examples of these include the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation (SYDV), Turkish Red Crescent, Turkish Education Foundation (TEV), and Istanbul University Center for Child Protection Practice and Research (ÇOKUM). These organizations provide various services to children, such as education and training programs, psychological support, and future career planning. Social workers, psychologists, and teachers working in these organizations assess and plan appropriate measures to meet all the needs of children.

In Turkiye, there are various services available in the social work sector for children belonging to vulnerable groups:

1. Child Protection Services: Various protection services are provided for children belonging to vulnerable groups to ensure their safety and well-being. These services include housing, nutrition, healthcare, education, and psychosocial support.
2. Rehabilitation Services: Rehabilitation services are provided to improve the physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being of children belonging to vulnerable groups. These services include physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, special education, and counseling.
3. Social Services: Social services are provided for vulnerable children and their families. These services include family counseling, advocacy, engagement, and teaching job skills.
4. Emergency Response Services: Emergency response services are provided for children belonging to vulnerable groups. These services include emergency assistance, shelter, protection from health issues, injuries, and cases of abuse.
5. Education Services: Education services are provided for children belonging to vulnerable groups. These services include special education, vocational training, and programs for non-formal education.
6. Court Consultation Services: Court consultation services are provided for legal matters involving children belonging to vulnerable groups. These services include legal advice, legal representation, and support in court proceedings.

The World Disability Union (World Disabled Union), established in Istanbul by the decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Turkiye and possessing international status, is engaged in various projects and practical activities. Currently, the

organization operates six regional offices on a global scale. The main objectives of the organization include preventing disability, ensuring equal opportunities, improving rehabilitation services, and implementing universal standards.

The Inclusive Education Network (IEN) is a platform created to establish conditions for education. IEN is a network that provides accessible and inclusive education information for everyone. The network involves teachers, parents, students, non-governmental organizations, and more. By implementing inclusivity and participation principles in its activities, the network supports the dissemination of the inclusivity concept and provides advisory services to international organizations, NGOs, UN agencies, and governments.

"The Enabling Education Review" is an annual bulletin that is published. It prepares and disseminates materials related to inclusive education, responds to inquiries from educational institutions worldwide, and participates in research and teaching processes.

There are very few training materials available for the rehabilitation of intellectual disabilities in Turkiye. It is also difficult for low-income families to obtain these resources. That is why efforts are being made to provide families with these materials to prepare children for school, as the family serves as the children's first educators.

Some countries, including the United States, Sweden, Japan, and Switzerland, utilize the experiences of foreign countries for organizing social work involving vulnerable groups of children. These countries develop various measures and programs for social and psychological assistance to children in sensitive groups.

In the United States, there are several programs and initiatives dedicated to organizing social work for vulnerable groups of children. One of these programs is the Head Start program. This program provides education and social support to children from economically disadvantaged families between the ages of 3 and 5.

There is a program in the United States that is in accordance with the Constitution and aims to protect the rights of children in order to prevent conflicts between family and school. Children are engaged at home under the guidance of their parents or professionals. An individualized educational plan is prepared for children up to the age of 3. In some states, this plan is utilized until the child reaches the age of 5, which is when the child is admitted to the preparatory class of school. The goal of the plan is to assist the family in the physical and moral development of the child, taking into consideration the family's basic requirements and the presence of other siblings. The plan must be developed within 45 days after the parents' application and is updated every 6 months. Although the organization of the initial aid system may vary from state to state, the family is always connected with a coordinator in all cases.

Individual education plans often differ from the individual work plans of families. Some parents prefer to organize their children's education in private schools and centers. In the United States, it is possible to encounter situations where the necessary conditions for a child's education are not provided at school, and if this can be proven in court, then the educational expenses can be covered by the school. In certain cases, the interventions conducted with specialists are carried out based on medical insurance.

In 1975, a law was enacted that aimed to provide better educational opportunities for children with disabilities. Currently, this law has been approved by all states of the United States and has been in effect since 1990 under the name "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act" (IDEA).

Inclusive education is being implemented in various places. In the United States, the convergence of special and general education is expressed through three concepts:

- mainstreaming (the organization of special classes in proximity to regular schools);
- providing education in a mass manner (providing specialized support for children with specific needs to receive education in regular classrooms);
- inclusive education (ensuring that children with special needs are included in education in their local communities regardless of the severity of their condition).

Negative attitudes are the number one obstacle to inclusive education for children with disabilities. Negative attitudes result in the constant exclusion, segregation, and isolation of children with disabilities. The use of appropriate language related to disabilities plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards people with disabilities. The language we use can either serve to describe and promote inclusion or contribute to the creation of negative stereotypes in society.

These barriers can be seen more clearly through the following circles:
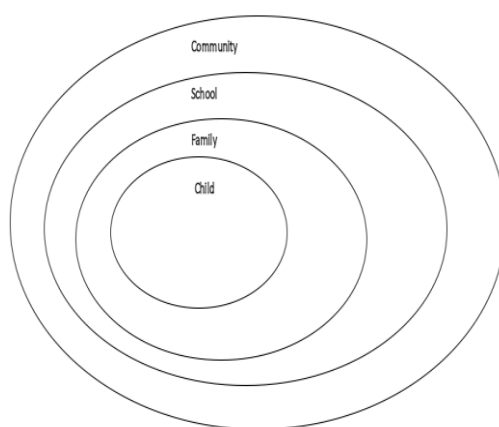
As it appears, society is shown as the biggest obstacle, followed by school, family, and finally children. It is evident that society itself is the major barrier. We need to work in order to transform these obstacles into possibilities using the proposed strategies.

In Sweden, there are several centers that organize social work with children who belong to vulnerable groups, where various programs and events are prepared. One of these centers is called Barnahus Center.

In Japan, there are special centers called Social Shelter Centers, assisting to the vulnerable groups, including children, families, and individuals combating social problems.

In Germany, every child can attend a kindergarten from the age of 3 until they reach 6 years old. However, compulsory primary education begins only after the age of 6. Until the age of 3, parents can choose to keep their children at home. Children with mental or speech impairments, as well as behavioral disorders, are admitted to general kindergartens following the recommendation of a special commission. Parents prepare their children who require special attention for school by involving specialists in various daycare centers. The instructions provided there are continued at home, and the child is equipped with the necessary skills and values for their future school life.

European countries have rich experiences in organizing social work with vulnerable groups. These countries have well-established social work sectors and social protection systems, and there are legislative measures in place to safeguard the rights and needs of vulnerable groups in each country. To ensure the effectiveness of the work, the following principles and experiences are applied:

1. Integration and coordination: European countries work by integrating the social work sector, healthcare services, schools, household support services, and other organizations to provide support to vulnerable groups. This enables the effective fulfillment of the needs of vulnerable groups and provides them with a larger support network.
2. Individualized services: European countries offer individualized services through organizations that support vulnerable groups. This means offering specific assistance measures tailored to the needs of vulnerable groups.
3. Collaboration and networking: In European countries, there is extensive collaboration and networking among organizations operating in the social work sector, government agencies, various cultural and religious groups, educational institutions, and so on. This allows for the pooling of resources, additional financial support, and the effective organization of initiatives.
4. Employment and educational opportunities: European countries aid the social integration of vulnerable groups by providing employment and educational opportunities. This is achieved through programs, organizations, and support initiatives that facilitate closer access to work experience and education for vulnerable groups. Employment organizations provide support to vulnerable groups in finding jobs and career development through interorganizational experience exchange, mentoring programs, and training. Additionally, educational opportunities help meet the needs of vulnerable groups by facilitating socialization, language learning, and fulfilling other needs, thus assisting them in realizing their potential.

3. Conclusion

Social workers engaged with vulnerable groups, particularly children, should evaluate the experiences and innovations in this field in foreign countries. By doing so, they can organize more effective and beneficial programs, reduce the negative impacts on vulnerable children, and contribute to their development. To achieve this, it would be beneficial to engage in experience and idea exchange with social workers working in this field in foreign countries or participate in international conferences and seminars related to this field. As a result, utilizing the experiences of social work organizations working with vulnerable children in foreign countries and adopting innovative practices aligned with their goals will be beneficial for the health, education, and psychological well-being of children.

These individuals may be less accepted in society and may lose their confidence as they are deprived of material or social resources and are unable to fulfill their desires and aspirations. Such situations can affect people's mental well-being and contribute to their experience of psychological problems. It is crucial to create an environment where everyone has equal opportunities for acceptance and realizing their potential. Supporting and encouraging individuals to enhance their self-beliefs are also significant factors. Therefore, the equal valuation of every individual by society, regardless of their affiliation, plays a crucial role in protecting the individual and social rights of people.

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