SOCIAL ADAPTATION AND ABILITY OF ROMA AND NON-ROMA CHILDREN LIVING IN TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

It is a fact that Roma people are among socially disadvantaged people who live in unenviable conditions. As education is one of the most important tools in the social integration of different groups in society, the identification of subgroups is a must for further steps on the way to providing scientifically valid and reliable studies. Considering these points and the insufficient amount of academic research in the field in Turkey, the researchers of the study aimed at investigating the social adaptation and abilities of five or six-year-old Roma children living in Konya, a city with nearly a million dwellers in Turkey. The study was conducted on 71 children, aged five or six years old, from Roma and non-Roma families. The data were gathered by means of the Social Adaptation and Ability Scale, and a survey form including some demographic questions. As a result, significant differences against the Roma children were found between the groups, and comprehensive studies and urgent measures were recommended on the issue.

UDC CODE & KEYWORDS

■ UDC: 304 ■ Roma Children ■ Social Adaptation and Ability
■ Preschool Period.

INTRODUCTION

General Overview of the Roma in Europe

Although the exact origin of the Roma is not known, some comparative studies of history and linguistics (Kenrick, 1994; Berger, 2000) indicate that the Roma originated in north-western India (Kafiristan, Dardistan), in the area near Ganges River. It is believed that they emigrated from the Punjab region of India to different parts of the world (Hancock, 2002; Berger, 2000). On the other hand, there are some different views on the time when the first immigrations started, most of which state that it dates back the fifth and tenth centuries (Miller, 2003; Ringold, 2000).

The origin of the Roma in Europe is also controversial as historical records indicate different dates ranging from the ninth to the fourteenth century (Ringold, 2000; Hancock, et al., 1998). As a result of their expansion throughout Europe, The Roma people live in nearly 50 countries today. The Roma people are said to be an indigenous community with a transnational identity, which can be defined as a stateless nation (Riggs, 1991). Although being far away from their ancestral homeland (India) for such a long time has led to very specific conditions for the Roma people, they have both preserved their traditional and cultural values and adapted themselves into the local, social and religious surroundings (Posavec and Hrvatic, 2000).

However, it is also a fact that, throughout the past, the Roma people have generally been perceived with distrust and repulsion, and have been left rather underdeveloped and impoverished in comparison with the rest of the population. For centuries, policies towards Roma people have been policies of negation of their culture and of their very existence as individuals and as a group, which have taken a variety of forms like exclusion or assimilation. In a

study into the discrimination and good practices in EU member states, Roma people are cited among the most vulnerable groups with respect to discrimination in education (Pollak, 2008). The dominant element in relations between Roma people and their immediate environment has usually been rejection in forms of accommodation difficulties, health hazards, evictions, refusal of admission to public places, etc., which has necessitated a movement to be launched within the international institutions, strongly dominated by education-related issues (Liégeois, 1999). As is known, societal realities create unequal conditions that make it difficult for a certain group of children to truly gain equal access to education (Bagilhole, 1997; Gewirtz, 1998). In view of these, the need of an all-encompassing approach has been recognized by many European countries following the resolution of the European Parliament, dated 16 March 1984, regarding education for children whose parents have no fixed abode. Also another resolution of the European Parliament (24 May 1984), regarding the situation of Gypsies with respect to school provision for Gypsy and Traveller children assigned the task of undertaking a study of the current state of affairs into some institutions. Nevertheless, the education of Roma children still poses problems like absenteeism, social inequality, insufficient parental interest in children's success, and lack of cooperation between schools and families, and etc. (Cozma, Cucos, and Momanu, 2000). Among the reasons that influence the education quality of Roma children, low-status of Roma families, high rate of unemployment, inadequate healthcare, non-urbanized settlements, illiterate or semi-illiterate parents, weak organization, and feelings of inferiority in relation to the rest of population are also cited (Igarashi, 2005; Posavec and Hrvatic, 2000; Kyuchukov, 2000).

General Overview of the Roma in Turkey

The social and legal status of the Roma population in Turkey is not enviable as there are some discriminating regulations against them (IBU, 2005). There are some beliefs among people that Roma people are cheater, thieves or pickpockets (Özkan, 2000; IBU, 2005).

The Roma people in Anatolia are said to have appeared in Turkey during the Byzantine period (Marsh, 2008). Though there are different records on their arrival time in Anatolia, the treaty of Lausanne is an important document about their return to Anatolia, as a result of which many citizens were exchanged according to the new state borders (Özkan, 2000).

The current Roma people population in Turkey is not known exactly as the ethnic identity is not mentioned in the censuses. It is also a fact that nearly 100.000 of the Roma people population in Turkey do not have the status of citizen since they are not registered officially (IBU, 2005). In his study on Roma people in Turkey, Özkan (2000) tried to find out the Roma people population in Turkey as proximal as possible by asking about the number of Roma people to the local people and the local authorities, and comparing their

answers with some records. Given the various documents and accounts, he concluded that nearly 500.000 Roma people live in Turkey.

The Roma people in Turkey usually work as a musician, a flower-seller, a horse dealer, a shoe shiner, a porter, or a blacksmith. As most of them are not qualified workers, they do some other daily jobs such as cleaning, street trading, flower-selling, etc. One of the rare studies into the educational level of the Roma people in Turkey revealed that nearly a quarter of the Roma' participants in the study were illiterate and only 1,1 % of them were graduated from secondary school (Kolukırk, 2006). The low educational level of the parents, unsuitable socio-cultural conditions, inability of families to afford the educational materials and various difficulties children met at school were cited among the reasons for the low educational level of the Roma people, which seems to cause significant problems in future. In a workshop held by Istanbul Bilgi University and British Council (IBU, 2005), the problems of the Roma children in Turkey were summarized as follows:

- Insufficient parental attention and lack of attendance to school
- Socialization problem of Roma children
- The mostly affected group by the social discrimination against Roma people: Children
- Insufficient public funds allocated by governments
- Problems in the teacher-pupil relations resulting from the prejudgement against Roma people

General Overview of the Relation between Social Environment and Education

Family is considered as a social instrument and principally responsible institution for the care and growth of children. The family environment where children grow up has a significant effect on their personality and socialization. The learning environment and the models presented by the family play an important role in the social behaviours and value formation of children.

The family type, the number of family members, the social and professional life of parents, the cultural preferences of the family, and the region where the family live are determining factors in the socialization of the children (Razon, 1987; Hatipoğlu, 1996, Güngör, 2002; İnanç, Bilgin, and Atıcı, 2005). Various studies have been carried out on the parents' care for their children in recent years, and it has been found that the success level, self-confidence and socio-communicative skills of the children get higher in accordance with their more efficient preschool period when they are cared by their parents regardless of what ethnic origin, socio-economic conditions or educational levels their parents have (Yavuzer, 1996).

As school environment is a principal social institution for children's socialization process, preschools aim to meet the needs of the children living in the disadvantaged regions, and thus play a significant role in presenting equal standards for every child as much as possible to start their primary education (citation removed). According to the results of studies, the children having preschool education are more adaptable, assertive and successful in their social relations than their peers who do not (Kaur and Kalaramna, 2004; Tuğrul, 2005).

Another important institution in the socialization period of children is the socio-economic status of the family, which has a profound effect on shaping and directing the children's personality. Demarest, Reisner, Anderson, Humphrey,

Farquhar, and Stein (1993) noted that a family's socioeconomic status is based on family income, parental education level, parental occupation, and social status in the community. Families with low socioeconomic status often lack the financial, social, and educational supports that characterize families with high socioeconomic status. Poor families also may have inadequate or limited access to community resources that promote and support children's development and school readiness, which may negatively affect families' decisions regarding their young children's development and learning. The children brought up in adverse economic conditions feel anxious and insecure, and the gap between the economical statuses of children's families may cause low self-esteem feeling among the poor children. The lack of confidence and negative feelings of parents living in poverty may affect their children as well, and cause them to be passive individuals with low self-esteem feeling (Yavuzer, 1996). Also, parents may have inadequate skills for such activities as reading to and with their children, and they may lack information about childhood immunizations and nutrition. Zill, Collins, West, and Hausken (1995) state that low maternal education and minority-language status are most consistently associated with fewer signs of emerging literacy and a greater number of difficulties in pre-schoolers. According to Ramey and Ramey (1994), for families in poverty, educational challenges can be formidable, as sometimes, when basic necessities are lacking, parents must place top priority on housing, food, clothing, and health care. Educational toys, games, and books may appear to be luxuries, and parents may not have the time, energy, or knowledge to find innovative and less-expensive ways to foster young children's development.

Many researchers have studied the beliefs, values and attitudes of the families from the lower socio-economical class, and studies have shown that socio-economic status is significantly correlated with some other factors the children's socialization and social context, including harsh discipline, lack of maternal warmth, exposure to aggressive adult models, maternal aggressive values, family life stressors, mother's lack of social support, peer group instability, and lack of cognitive stimulation (Campbell, 2006; Dodge, Pettit, and Bates, 1994; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, and Klebanov, 1994; Ogbu, 1983) also stated that adverse educational environment affects the thinking skills development and interpersonal problem-solving capacities of children.

In similar studies held in Turkey, some similar results have been obtained. Kızıltan (1984) studied the effect of parents' attitudes on adaptation skill levels of children and revealed that the children from low socio-economic level exhibited some adaptation difficulties due to the restrictions in their social, economic and educational life. Similarly, in a study into the relationship between parents' attitudes and their children's aggressiveness, Hatunoğlu (1994) found that the children from low socio-economic level were more aggressive than the ones from high socio-economic level. In a study into the social and emotional development of five-six year-old children according to the full or part-time curriculum in various schools (Özgülük, 2006), the children belonging to the high socio-economic class were found to establish much more positive relations with their peers than the ones from low socio-economic groups. In conclusion, it could be said that the family environment with all its aspects influences social and emotional development of children, and that the children belonging to high socio-economic levels exhibit more successful social development process (Yavuzer, 1998).

It is a fact that Roma people are among socially disadvantaged people who live in unenviable conditions. As education is one of the most important tools in the social integration of different groups in society, the identification of subgroups is a must for further steps on the way to providing scientifically valid and reliable studies. Considering these points and the insufficient amount of academic research in the field in Turkey, the researchers of the study aimed at investigating the social adaptation and ability of five or six-year-old Roma children living in Konya, a city with nearly a million dwellers in Turkey.

Method

The survey model was used in the study. A survey form "Social Adaptation and Ability Scale" developed by Işık (2007) was applied to 31 Roma and 41 non-Roma children in order to determine the social adaptation and ability of the children. The questions were asked to the parents and the teachers of the children. On the survey form there were also some questions to gather some demographic features of the participants. The data of the study was analyzed by computing frequencies, percentage dispersions, means, standard deviations, and independent t-test.

Table 1: The Breakdown of the Roma and non-Roma children according to their gender

Groups	Gender	N	%
Roma children	Boy	18	60
	Girl	12	40
Non-Roma children	Boy	20	48,8
	Girl	21	51,2
Total		71	100

Source: Author

As is seen from the table, the sampling group consisted of 71 children, 30 of whom were Roma children and 41 of whom were non-Roma children. 60% of the Roma participants were boys while the rest 40% were girls. As for the non-Roma participants 51% were girls and 48,8 % were boys.

Table 2: The breakdown of the parents of Roma and non-Roma children according to their educational level

Educational Level	Roma				Non-Roma			
	Mother		Father		Mother		Father	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Illiterate	9	30	1	3,3	0	0	0	0
Literate	6	20	13	43,3	1	2,4	27	2,4
Elementary School	15	50	16	53,4	35	85,4	11	65,9
University	0	0	0	0	5	12,2	2	26,8
Postgraduate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4,9
Total	30	100	30	100	41	100	41	100

Source: Author

Table 2 shows that 50 % of the Roma mothers were graduated from elementary school, 30 % of them were literate but 20% of them didn't know how to read and write. It can also be seen from table 2 that 85,4% of non-Roma mothers were graduated from elementary school, 12,2 % of them were graduated from university and 2,4 % of them were literate.

As for the educational status of the fathers, we can see from the table 2 that 53,4% of the Roma fathers graduated from elementary school, 43,3 % of them were literate and 3,3% of them were illiterate. The percentages of non-Roma parents as regards their educational level were a bit different from those of the Roma fathers. 65,9 % of non-Roma fathers were graduated from elementary school, 26,8 % of them

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graduated from university , 4,9 % of them had post-graduate education, and 2,4 % of them were literate.

It can be concluded from the table 2 that majority of the parents in the study were graduated from elementary school.

Table 3: The breakdown of the Roma and non-Roma parents according to their age

Age	Roma				Non-Roma			
	Mother		Father		Mother		Father	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
18-20	2	6,7	2	6,7	0	0	0	0
21-25	14	46,7	6	20	6	14,6	0	0
26-35	9	30	15	50	31	75,6	23	56,1
36-45	5	16,7	3	10	4	9,8	16	39
46 and over	0	0	4	13,3	0	0	2	4,9
Total	30	100	30	100	41	100	41	100

Source: Author

Table 3 shows that 46,7% of Roma mothers were 21-25 years old, 30% of them were 26-35 years old, 16,7% of them were 36-45, and 6,7 % of them were 18-20 years old. As for the Roma fathers, 50 % of them were 26-35, 20 % of them were 21-25 years old, 13,3 % of them were 46 years old and over, 10% were 36-45 years old and 6,7 % were 18-20 years old.

Table 3 also says that the ages of the Non-Roma parents were quite similar unlike those of Roma parents: 75,6 % of non-Roma mothers were 26-35 years old, 14,6 % of them were 21-25 years old and 9,8 % of them were 36-45 years old. As for non-Roma fathers, 56,1 % of them were 26-35 years old, 39 % of them were 36-45 years old and 4,9 % of them were 46 years old and over. These figures point out that Roma woman became mother at earlier ages than the non-Roma mothers. In the study, it was also found that the number of the children of Roma and non-Roma families varied significantly.

Table 4: The breakdown of the Roma and non-Roma parents according to how many children they have

The number of children	Roma		Non-Roma	
	N	%	N	%
Single child	6	20	18	43,9
Two children	7	23,3	15	36,5
Three children	10	33,4	4	9,8
Four children and over	7	23,3	4	9,8
Total	30	100	41	100

Source: Author

As is seen from the table above, 33,4% of the Roma families had three children, 23,3% of them two children and 23,3% of them had four and more children. As for the non-Roma families, 43,9% of them had a single child, 36,5% of them had two children, 9,8% of them had three children, and 9,8% of them had four and more children. It is clear from the table that the Roma families had more children than the non-Roma.

Table 5 shows that 40% of Roma children were the second child, 36,7% of them were the first child, 20% of them were the fourth and over child, and 3,3% of them were the third child in the family. As for the non-Roma children, it was found that 43,9% of them were the first child, 36,5% of them were the second child, 9,8% of them were the third and the other 9,8% of them were the fourth and over child in the family. It can be concluded from the table that most of the participants in the study, either Roma or non-Roma, were the first or the second child in the family.

Table 5: The breakdown of Roma and non-Roma children according to in which order they are among their siblings

The order of children among their siblings	Roma		Non-Roma	
	N	%	N	%
1. child	11	36,7	18	43,9
2. child	12	40	15	36,5
3. child	1	3,3	4	9,8
4. child and over	6	20	4	9,8
Total	30	100	41	100

Source: Author

Table 6: The breakdown of the Roma and non-Roma parents according to their professions

Profession	Roma				Non-Roma			
	Mother		Father		Mother		Father	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Housewife	22	73,3	0	0	39	95,2	0	0
Self-employed	6	20	2	6,8	1	2,4	4	9,8
State-official	0	0	0	0	1	2,4	11	26,8
Technician	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	9,8
Worker	2	6,7	14	46,6	0	0	22	53,6
Unemployed	0	0	14	46,6	0	0	0	0
Total	30	100	30	100	41	100	41	100

Source: Author

In view of the findings displayed in table 6, it can be seen that 73,3% of Roma mothers were housewives, 20% of them were self-employed and 6,7% of them were workers. 46,6 % of Roma fathers were workers, 46,6 of them were unemployed and 6,8% of them were self-employed.

As for non-Roma parents, it was found that 95,2% of mothers were housewives, 2,4% of them were self-employed and 2, 4% of them were state officials. The breakdown of non-Roma fathers in terms of their profession was that 53,6% of them were workers, 26,8% of them state officials, 9,8% of them were technicians and the other 9,8% of them were self-employed. Considering the findings in table 6, it can be said that most of the mothers were housewives and most of the fathers were workers in the study.

Table 7: The Breakdown of the Roma and non-Roma participants according to their parents' marital status

The marital status of the participants' parents'	Roma		Non-Roma	
	N	%	N	%
Married	17	56,7	41	100
Divorced or separated	9	30	0	0
Father at prison	4	13,3	0	0
Total	30	100	41	100

Source: Author

The figures in table 7 point out that 56,7% of Roma parents in the study were married, while 30% of them either divorced or separated. It also says that 13,3 % of Roma fathers were at prison. On the other hand, it can be seen that all of the non-Roma parents were married.

When the t-test findings related with the social adaptation and ability scores of Roma and non-Roma children are examined, it is seen that there was a significant difference

between the groups at $p < .05$. As is seen from Table 8, the mean of Roma children's social adaptation and ability scores was $X = 48,10$, while that of non-Roma children was $X = 59,56$, which reveals that the social adaptation and ability scores of five or six-year-old non-Roma children were significantly higher than the ones of Roma children at the same age.

Table 8: n, X and t values according to the social adaptation and ability scores of Roma and non-Roma children

SAAS	N	X	Ss	t	P
Roma	30	48,1	8,19	4,48	,000*
Non-Roma	41	59,56	13,28		

Source: Author

The significant difference in favour of non-Roma children's social adaptation and ability scores suggest that the family environment may affect the social adaptation and ability development of children, because when the results were evaluated, it was found that the educational and employment levels of Roma parents were much lower than the non-Roma parents. They were also younger than their non-Roma counterparts, even though they have more children. The marital status of the Roma parents was also different than that of non-Roma parents in that nearly half of them were either divorced or separated and some of the Roma fathers were at prison, while all of the non-Roma parents were married.

Discussion

A considerable amount of study has shown that there is a significant relationship between the family environment where children grow up and their personality and socialization development (Razon, 1987; Hatipoğlu, 1996; Güngör, 2002). There is a strong relationship between the socialization of the children and the family type, the number of family members, the social and professional life of parents, the cultural preferences of the family, and the region where the family live (İnanç, Bilgin ve Atıcı, 2005; Yavuzer, 1996). The learning environment and the models presented by the family play an important role in the social behaviours and value formation of children (Hatipoğlu, 1996).

This study also exhibits similar results in that the social adaptation and ability scores of Roma children were found to be significantly lower than the non-Roma children's, which suggests that there may be a relationship between the discrepancy between these levels and the family environment the participants have grown up in. Given the data related with the participants' families, it is evident that there is a huge gap between the education levels of the parents: none of the Roma parents had university or post-graduate education, and nearly a third of Roma mothers were illiterate. On the contrary a great majority of non-Roma mothers were graduated from elementary school, and none of them were illiterate. The highest education status the Roma fathers achieved was elementary school while 31, 7 % of non-Roma fathers had either a university or a post-graduate education diploma.

Socio-economic status of family has long been known to play a part in shaping and directing the children's personality (Ramey and Ramey, 1994; Kaur and Kalamanna, 2004). As children are affected by their parents' attitudes, values, behaviours and thoughts, it is argued that the lack of confidence and negative feelings of parents living in poverty may affect their children as well, and cause them to be passive individuals with low self-esteem feeling

(Yavuzer, 1996). One of the findings in this study, which may give some idea about the socio-economic level of the family, (see Table 6), is that nearly half of the Roma fathers were unemployed, which is just the opposite of the non-Roma fathers. The high percentage of the unemployed Roma fathers suggests that there may be a relationship between the economic level of the families and their children's social adaptation and ability scores.

One of the most important factors that affect the children's psychological, social and economic life, the parents' divorce may contribute to children's difficulties during post-divorce process (Amato and Keith, 1991; Amato, 2001; Kelly and Emery, 2003; Yörükoğlu, 2008). One of these difficulties is the loss of emotional and financial support of one parent and more life stress resulting from the difficulties children face in adjusting some radical changes. Lack of parental competence or poor parental adjustment as well as conflicts between parents are some other risks children may experience in families that have undergone divorce (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1975). It is also argued that children from divorced families were on average somewhat worse than children who lived in intact families: these children had more difficulty in school, more behaviour problems, more negative self-concepts, more problems with peers, and more trouble getting along with their parents (Amato and Keith 1991, Amato, 2001). Given the findings of the research into the effects of divorce on children, it can be said that there is a parallelism between their results and the ones obtained in this study. The social adaptation and ability scores of the Roma children were found to be significantly lower than those of non-Roma children. It was also determined that 30% of Roma parents were divorced or separated, and 13, 3% of Roma fathers were at prison, which means that nearly half of the Roma children lived in a single-parent environment. When these findings are evaluated, it could be said that the broken relationships between parents might play a role in the low social adaptation and ability scores of the Roma children.

It is a fact that preschools aim to prepare children for future by helping them pass their early childhood years in the best physical, social, emotional and cognitive conditions (citation removed; Yavuzer, 1998). It is also claimed that preparing children for elementary schools with their peers under supervision of trained staff in suitable preschools bring about much better results no matter how satisfactory their family environments are (citation removed; Tuğrul, 2005). One of the findings in this study was that none of the Roma children had preschool education, while all the non-Roma participants were attending a preschool. Given the result that social adaptation and ability scores of Roma children are significantly lower than the ones of non-Roma children in the study, it could be concluded that lack of preschool education might have played a role in their lower social adaptation and ability scores. In view of these facts, it could be said that Roma children should be encouraged to get preschool education to facilitate their adaptation to school and society life, and families should be addressed to solve their children's education problems (IBU, 2005).

The demographic changes in Turkey in the recent years, and its vulnerability to some global changes due to its geo-political location on the world map, make it more vital to launch some comprehensive social and educational campaigns towards maintaining social peace and justice. Socially disadvantaged groups from different ethnic origins, though ethnicity is not a problem in the country on a large scale, are more vulnerable to the social, economic and educational problems of the country. Given all these facts, and the findings of the study, which mirror the problems of

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some neglected social groups on a very limited scale, it can be recommended that larger studies which encompass more participants from different regions be conducted to determine problems of socially disadvantaged groups. The social, economic and educational needs of these populations should also be met by governmental bodies in cooperation with the academic circles. With this aim, some seminars and workshops can be held, various educational materials like books, magazines, CDs, etc. can be given away, and audio-visual media can be used to arouse the interest of parents in their children's psychological and social development, and to help them create and maintain healthy relationships with their children. The interest and support of NGOs and local governments should also be canalised into the comprehensive and sustainable plans and projects in the area. This matter concerns not only the educational circles but also various governmental bodies for the social integration and economic development of the society. Regional Rehabilitation Centres may be useful for the controlled socialization process of the Roma people by providing free services to improve the social abilities of children and their parents, and help them get the necessary knowledge and ability in their social life.

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