

Turkish Cypriot Children's attitude towards Turkish domestic workers from Turkey

Introduction

KADEM carried out a small-scale research in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Childhood and Adolescence in the Greek Cypriot community on Turkish Cypriot children's attitudes towards Turkish domestic workers from Turkey. The research has been supported by the Bi-communal Development Programme, which is funded by USAID and UNDP and is executed by UNOPS, and tried to examine children's knowledge about, perceptions of, and attitudes towards foreign workers, with particular focus on Turkish domestic workers, who live in Cyprus.

A survey, two focus groups, and 10 in-depth interviews were conducted for this purpose. The aim was to observe general trends in both quantitative and qualitative ways, by looking at the dynamics of the underlying factors of children's perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. There are many interesting results regarding the issues of identity, identification, children's sources of information about foreigners, their definitions and perceptions of otherness. These results have provided us with the opportunity to analyse the issue psychologically, pedagogically, and sociologically. This article focuses on one aspect of the research results: Turkish Cypriot children's attitudes towards Turkish domestic workers from Turkey. After providing some of the survey and qualitative study results about children's attitudes the implications of these results in relation to the "contact hypothesis" view, which states that contact between members of different groups will improve relations between them, will be discussed.

Turkish Cypriot Children's Perception of Domestic Workers from Turkey

Thirty-five percent (35%) of the children in the sample have domestic workers at home. This percentage increases to 50% among children whose father is a university graduate and decreases to 10-15% among children whose father graduated from middle or lycee/technical school. Out of the domestic workers who live in their own homes, 87% of them work one or two days a week. The main group of domestic workers are from Turkey (62%), and the second largest group are from Bulgaria (24%). Most of the domestic workers have been working for two years or less in their existing houses.

Although the majority of children (63%) think positively about the possibility of developing relations with mainland Turks, it is the children who have domestic workers at home (77%) who tend to think that understanding and developing these relationships is possible. This proportion decreases to 57% among children who do not have a domestic worker (*see Table1*). This differentiation exists in children's attitudes towards Turks. We haven't seen the same kind of differentiation in children's attitudes towards Greeks or Americans, for example. In other words, whether a family has or does not have a domestic worker influences the children's attitudes towards the particular group.

Table 1: To what extent do you think it is possible to understand and develop relations with Turks (from Turkey)?

						Total
		Great Extent	Little Extent	Not at all	Don't know/ no answer	
Whether the child has a domestic worker at home	Yes	26	4	2	2	34
		76,5%	11,8%	5,9%	5,9%	100%
	No	35	17	8	3	63
		55,6%	27,0%	12,7%	4,8%	100%
Total		61	21	10	5	97
		62,9%	21,6%	10,3%	5,2%	100%

The survey also illustrated that 35% of children who have a domestic worker at home like the Turks a lot. This decreases to 19% among children without a domestic worker (Table 2).

Table 2: To what extent do you like or dislike Turks (from Turkey)?

								Total
		I dislike them a lot	I dislike them a little	I neither like nor dislike them	I like them a little	I like them a lot	Don't know/no answer	
Whether the child has a domestic worker at home	Yes	10	3	4	3	12	2	34
		29,4%	8,8%	11,8%	8,8%	35,3%	5,9%	100%
	No	21	9	6	13	12	2	63
		33,3%	14,3%	9,5%	20,6%	19,0%	3,2%	100%
Total		31	12	10	16	24	4	97
		32,0%	12,4%	10,3%	16,5%	24,7%	4,1%	100%

These results clearly show that there is a strong correlation between the “contact with” and “perception of” the other group. Surely we cannot infer causal relationship between these two factors. In other words, we cannot argue that contact with another group directly causes a decrease in prejudicial attitudes. There are many intertwining factors which decrease or increase these attitudes. However, in general, the results support the “contact hypothesis”, that is to say, interaction between members of different groups will reduce negative intergroup attitudes and stereotypes.

This tendency becomes stronger when we compare children with a domestic worker in terms of their “total contact time”. Nearly half of the children have “very good” or “good” relationships with their domestic worker. Twenty seven percent (27%) of the children stated that they have neither “good” nor “bad” relations. Nearly 60% of the children spend an average of two or more hours with their domestic worker on their

working days. For example, 15 out of total 20 who spend 2 or more hours with their domestic worker stated that they have a “very good” or “good” relationship with their domestic worker (70%). However, only 2 out of 10 children who spend less than an hour with their domestic worker stated that they have “very good” or “good” relationships with them (20%). Thirty five percent (35%) of children who have a domestic worker do talk to her.

Implications and some further discussion

More contact means less prejudice. However, we should not be so naïve to believe that contact alone is sufficient to increase positive relations between members of different groups. As the small-scale study observed, “contact should be intimate, cooperative and orientated towards the achievement of a shared goal” Moreover, it should occur between equal status participants who are interacting in an environment where integration is institutionally sanctioned (Dixon, 1). Unfortunately, contact in everyday life rarely occurs under appropriate conditions. When Turkish Cypriot children were asked to state what they like most about their domestic workers, most of them used items related to domestic workers’ collective duties, rather than their individual characteristics. For example, the most liked thing about the domestic worker is that “she cleans our house”.

Most children tend to only see Turks interacting with their parents as a part of paid service, like domestic or gardening works. This causes children to know and identify these groups with characteristics connected to their work interactions. This radically restricts the opportunity for children to observe or relate to their domestic workers’ daily activities. When we compare children in focus groups, those who interact with their domestic workers daily and in different settings more frequently tend to talk about different habits, attitudes and behaviours as well as individual characteristics. As Brewer and Miller (1984) argue, “intergroup contact is more effective when in-group-out group distinctions are not salient”. This allows participants to get to know each other as *individuals*. “A lack of personalised contact-as when individuals interact with each other as representatives of different social categories-makes it more difficult to reduce prejudice” (Jones, 179).

Another important factor is school segregation in Nicosia. In some schools most students are Turkish Cypriots with few Turkish students. In other schools included in our sample more than 95% of the students are Turkish students (from Turkey). However, the former group of schools have better conditions than the latter group. The families of each group live in different areas of Nicosia, with the families of the Turkish students mainly living in the walled city of Nicosia and Turkish Cypriots living in the suburbs. This geographical segregation with school segregation increases isolation, which reinforces the lack of contact between the two groups. Limited contact means that when such a meeting should occur there is no institutional support.

Nowadays, Turkish Cypriot children think that it is possible to understand and develop relations with mainland Turks and this could be reinforced by more contact between the groups. However, building these relations could potentially lead to future conflicts. Currently, there is no serious tension between the two groups but if

domestic workers decided not “to clean the houses” of Turkish Cypriots could there be a demand for a new status?

The following books and articles have been referred to in this article:

Dixon, J. and Durkheim, K. 2003. “Contact and ecology of racial division: Some varieties of informal segregation”. *Social Psychology*, Vol. 42, Part 1, March 2003.

Jones, M. 2002. *Social Psychology of Prejudice*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Miller, N and Brewer, M. 1984. *Groups in contact: The psychology of desegregation*. New York: Academic Press.