

# An Investigation into the Perceptions and Stereotypical Beliefs of Preschool-Age Children Regarding Poverty

Gülseren Erhan\*, Seda Şahin\*\*, Gülşah Doğanay\*\*\*

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## Abstract

The perception of poverty among children in the process of socialization can be indicative of how society perceives poverty. Identifying this perception is crucial for developing different approaches to address poverty. Stereotypes related to poverty are another important aspect that draws attention. Stereotypes involve generalizing specific characteristics of one social group based on comparisons with another group. This study aims to determine preschool children's perceptions and stereotypes regarding poverty. The research method employed is qualitative, utilizing a case study design. Data was collected through drawings and semi-structured interviews with five-year-old children. Content analysis was employed for data analysis. The research findings revealed that children's perceptions of poverty can be grouped under four themes: financial situation, housing and sanitary conditions, health, and living spaces. Children's stereotypes about poverty emerged as "economic, health, physical, gender, and cultural-oriented stereotypes." In conclusion, it can be stated that children develop both perceptions of poverty and societal stereotypes related to poverty from an early age.

**Keywords:** Early childhood, perception, poverty, stereotypes, stereotypes related to poverty

## Okul Öncesi Dönem Çocuklarının Yoksullukla İlgili Algılarının ve Kalıp Yargularının İncelenmesi

### Öz

Toplumsallaşma sürecinde olan çocukların yoksulluk algısı, toplumun yoksulluğu nasıl gördüğünün göstergesi olabilir. Bu algının belirlenmesi, yoksullukla ilgili farklı yaklaşımların geliştirilmesi açısından önemlidir. Yoksullukla ilgili dikkat çeken bir diğer konu ise kalıp yargılardır. Kalıp yargılar, bir toplumsal grubun başka bir toplumsal gruba karşılaştırılmasına dayanan ve bir gruba özgü özelliklerin genelleştirilmesidir. Bu çalışmada okul öncesi dönem çocuklarının yoksullukla ilgili algılarının ve kalıp yargularının ne olduğunun belirlenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Araştırmanın modeli, nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden durum

\* İnönü Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, Temel Eğitim Bölümü, Okul Öncesi Öğretmenliği, Malatya, Türkiye, [gulseren.sagsoz@inonu.edu.tr](mailto:gulseren.sagsoz@inonu.edu.tr), ORCID: [0000-0002-5655-039X](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5655-039X) 

\*\* İnönü Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, Temel Eğitim Bölümü, Okul Öncesi Öğretmenliği, Malatya, Türkiye, [seda.sahin@inonu.edu.tr](mailto:seda.sahin@inonu.edu.tr), ORCID: [0000-0002-4034-7864](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4034-7864) 

\*\*\* Giresun Üniversitesi, Giresun Meslek Yüksekokulu, Mimarlık ve Şehir Planlama, Giresun, Türkiye, [gdoganay61@hotmail.com](mailto:gdoganay61@hotmail.com), ORCID: [0000-0002-7456-8788](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7456-8788) 

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*çalışması olarak desenlenmiştir. Araştırmanın verileri, beş yaş çocukların çizimleriyle ve onlarla yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerle elde edilmiştir. Veriler içerik analiziyle çözümlenmiştir. Araştırmaya göre çocukların yoksulluk algıları; mali durum, barınma ve sıhhi koşullar, sağlık ve yaşam alanı olmak üzere dört temada toplanmıştır. Çocukların yoksullukla ilgili kalıp yargıları ise "ekonomi, sağlık, fiziksel, cinsiyet ve kültürel etmenler odaklı kalıp yargılar" olarak açığa çıkmıştır. Sonuç olarak erken yaşlardan itibaren çocukların yoksullukla ilgili hem algıya sahip oldukları hem de toplumsal kalıp yargıları öğrendikleri söylenebilir.*

**Anahtar sözcükler:** *Algı, erken çocukluk dönemi, kalıp yargılar, yoksulluk, yoksullukla ilgili kalıp yargılar*

## **Introduction**

Poverty is a highly significant phenomenon both globally and locally. According to the dictionary definition, poverty refers to "the state of lacking the necessary resources to sustain a person's livelihood; having an income below the minimum level required to meet basic needs, resulting in a substandard living condition" (Türkiye Bilimler Akademisi Sosyal Bilimler Sözlüğü, 2011, 1996). Poverty is also described by various concepts such as absolute poverty, relative poverty, income poverty, human poverty, chronic poverty, urban poverty, and working poverty (Ak, 2016; Uyan-Semerci, 2010). However, individuals in all societies are divided into the poor and non-poor, which constitutes an inadequate definition of poverty, as perceptions of poverty vary based on location, culture, and individuals' self-perception of poverty. Hence, it is necessary to evaluate the phenomenon of poverty in terms of fundamental human rights and the dimensions of social justice. In this context, deprivation of basic needs necessary for a healthy life (clean water, food, shelter, clothing, access to healthcare and medication, education, employment, energy, and communication) is considered a commonly agreed-upon measure of poverty (Uyan-Semerci, 2010). This approach, referred to as human poverty, is based on the notion that individuals should have economic, social, and cultural opportunities for their development and to lead a dignified life (Doğan & Tatlı, 2014; Memiş, 2014).

Perceptions related to poverty can conceptually indicate how society views poverty. Therefore, determining children's perception of poverty is crucial for developing diverse approaches to address poverty. Perception includes children's prior experiences and learning processes (Cüceloğlu, 1997). In early ages, children show interest in objects and events, focusing particularly on those that seem interesting and different to them. Daily experiences play a significant role in children's perceptual development, reflecting an essential aspect of cognitive development. Piaget argues that children comprehend and interpret the world they perceive during their thinking process and express it with the words they know (Piaget, 2005).

Apart from their cognitive development, children can perceive the world through their social development as well. According to Bandura's social learning theory, children develop cognitively and perceptually through cognitive, behavioral, and environmental interactions. Particularly by observing and imitating adult behaviors,

children transform learning experiences into their own (Cüceloğlu, 1997). Children comprehend what is what in their environment by imitating adult behaviors. It can be said that through these developmental processes, children gain awareness of concepts like poverty and wealth. They are influenced by the cultural and societal factors in which they live, develop a sense of social responsibility, and become aware of economic inequalities in society (Chafel, 1997; Hakovirta & Kallio, 2016; Ramsey, 1991). They perceive poverty individually, emotionally, mentally, environmentally, politically, in appearance, and economically (Witter & Bukokhe, 2004). The environment in which an individual grows up and societal understandings can influence their perspective, understanding, and perception of poverty. Moreover, these factors can lead to the emergence of stereotypes.

Stereotypes, which form a cognitive structure containing an individual's knowledge, beliefs, and expectations about certain social groups (Hamilton & Trolie, 1986, cited in Bigler & Liben, 2006, p.42), are rigid, exaggerated, and oversimplified impressions based on the comparison of one social group with another, highlighting the different characteristics between the groups (Judd & Park, 1993). Research on the development of stereotypes in individuals suggests that environmental and social interactions play a crucial role, and stereotypes can be observed in all members of society, with children being more susceptible to them (Agustin et al., 2021). Due to their limited experiences, children can develop stereotypes, attempting to comprehend complex information by compressing it into narrow concepts (Gander & Gardiner, 2004). In this way, children not only develop stereotypes developmentally but also strongly influenced by the prevailing stereotypes in society and tend to adopt them (Chafel, 1997; Leahy, 1981).

The processes of inclusion and exclusion within social groups significantly contribute to children's acquisition of stereotypes. Particularly from early childhood, the criteria for inclusion in groups are justified based on conformity to the expectations brought about by stereotypes (Mulvey et al., 2010). The higher prevalence of stereotypes among children can be attributed to having fewer social experiences and the reflection of dominant understandings within the family.

The stereotypes related to poverty encompass various components, as seen in international studies, such as intelligence, academic achievement, social skills, laziness, low educational level, substance dependency, immigration status, or mental state (Gorski, 2012; Lindqvist et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2021). For instance, Durante and Fiske (2017) mention the association of laziness and substance dependency with impoverished individuals. Upon examining these approaches and similar perspectives on poverty, it becomes evident that perceptions and stereotypes related to poverty are diverse, often marked by exaggerated, false, and oversimplified generalizations, leading to the marginalization of poor individuals within societies. The fact that "poor" individuals are perceived as violated in their rights, as individuals who have not been "successful," deemed "lazy" or "lacking sufficient effort," and as outsiders

to life is noteworthy (Uyan-Semerci, 2010). The persistence of societal stereotypes that define poverty based on individuals' lives and habits rather than seeing it as a social phenomenon and problem may perpetuate these stereotypes. Such thinking can reflect in behaviors and words, leading children to develop rigid and unchanging beliefs about poverty.

During early childhood, children can perceive and internalize many concepts related to poverty based on their experiences, observations, and what they hear (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2004). Economic disparities, money, poverty, and wealth are also concepts that children can learn within the framework of their daily life experiences (Ramsey, 1991). Children, in line with their social development, acquire various individual, structural, and fatalistic approaches related to poverty based on the knowledge they gain in social life (Heberle et al., 2018; Mistry et al., 2016) and possess information and perception about the nature of poverty (Amar et al., 2015). Additionally, children are aware of both the structural and internal/psychological effects of poverty (Chafel & Neitzel, 2005; Heberle et al., 2018; Weinger, 1998, 2000). Therefore, children may perceive a wealthy person as more intelligent or hardworking than a poor person and may show a preference for wealth (Sigelman, 2012). According to Heberle and Carter (2020), when children encounter negative attitudes related to poverty, they can develop stereotypes about poverty that may arise independently of their socio-economic status.

Children's stereotypes related to poverty mostly focus on socio-economic class (Durante & Fiske, 2017). While socio-economic stereotypes are less evident in children under five years old (Heberle & Carter, 2015), children aged five to six can have class-based stereotypes (Vandebroeck, 2021). In this age group, children can categorize people based on their economic class using clothing or appearance to stereotype them and reflect this in their choice of friends (Sigelman, 2012; Vandebroeck, 2021). By the age of six, children can make comments about individuals' wealth or poverty and classify adult photographs they are shown based on socio-economic status (Ramsey, 1991; Sigelman, 2012). In summary, children become aware of what poverty is from a young age and start forming stereotypes related to poverty from the age of five.

International research on preschool and higher education age groups regarding poverty reveals studies examining children's views on poverty, social class differences, poverty perceptions, stereotypes, and related topics (Amar et al., 2015; Heberle & Carter, 2020; Horwitz et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2018; Vandebroeck, 2021; Yang & Dunham, 2021). However, in the literature review conducted in Turkey, no research was found that revealed children's perceptions and stereotypes related to poverty. It is believed that changing the misconceptions in people's minds about poverty will start with altering the perception of poverty and the associated stereotypes. Therefore, in the fight against poverty, it is essential to replace inaccurate images with accurate ones.

In this study, five-year-old children's views were examined based on the literature's needs. After reviewing the studies, it is clear that researchers have examined poverty perceptions of children aged 11-15 (Hakovirta & Kallio, 2016), poverty-related stereotypes of children of different ages (Heberle & Carter, 2020), and the socioeconomic class and poverty thoughts of children aged five to 12 (Weinger, 1998). However, it was observed that there was not enough focus on five-years-old children to examine the perceptions and stereotypes that develop from an early age. In children aged five, where participation in pre-school education is common, socialization increases, and interaction between peers also develops. Participants were selected from the age group of five, considering that it is important to determine the perceptions and stereotypes of children in this age group, as their spheres of influence increase. At the age of five, children become part of society and place importance on peer relationships. Children in this age group are aware of what it means to be a member of a community and can distinguish their characteristics from others (Cüceloğlu, 1997; Gander & Gardiner, 2004). Therefore, the general aim of this research is to examine the perceptions and stereotypes related to poverty among five-year-old children receiving pre-school education. To achieve this aim, the study aims to answer the questions: "What are children's perceptions related to poverty?" and "What are children's stereotypes related to poverty?"

Today, various factors such as pandemics, global climate crises, imbalanced production and consumption, and excessive resource depletion have led to an increase in poverty both globally and locally. This situation has adversely affected the economic lives of certain social groups and individuals, making poverty an essential part of people's lives. In terms of resolving humanitarian issues, determining the views of children on poverty, as future shapers, and identifying stereotypes related to poverty and the extent of these stereotypes would contribute significantly to the literature. Furthermore, this study is deemed important in providing a different perspective on fighting poverty and proposing solutions.

### **Method**

This study aims to examine the perceptions and stereotypes of poverty among preschool-aged children, and it adopts a qualitative research method. Specifically, it utilizes the case study design, which is one of the qualitative research methods, to deeply explore and analyze data related to one or more specific situations obtained from diverse and authentic real-life contexts within its defined boundaries (Creswell, 2013; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The case study design aims to construct a comprehensive and contextual understanding by analyzing the data in a holistic and structured manner (Patton, 2018, p. 447).

### **Participants**

The participants of the study were determined through criterion sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods. In consultation with the Provincial Directorate of

National Education, two schools in the city attended by children of parents in the middle socioeconomic income group were determined. To prevent children from being negatively affected due to differences in income, children from lower and higher socioeconomic levels were not included in the study. Six classes were randomly selected by interviewing the administrators of two schools. By interviewing the classroom teachers, five children from each class who showed normal development and whose families' perceived socioeconomic level was moderate were randomly selected, and the criteria were completed. Since some of these children gave up participating in the study during the process, data from these children were not used. Consequently, a total of 24 five-year-old children, 13 girls and 11 boys, who attended two different independent and official kindergartens in a central district of a metropolitan city in the east of Turkey, constituted the participant group of the study. Five of the children have both mothers and fathers working, and 19 children have only their fathers working. The parents of the children participating in the study have fixed-incomes.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

#### **The family information form**

This form was used as a data collection tool to obtain information about the children's families. This form includes information about the families' employment status, income level, and the ages of their children.

#### **Semi-structured interview**

While preparing semi-structured interview questions for children, the literature was examined, and the questions were created accordingly. A total of six interview questions were presented to three experts from the fields of psychological counseling and guidance, child development, and preschool teaching in order to be examined in terms of their suitability for the children's developmental period. Since the experts stated that a question regarding "the relationship between poverty and money" did not need to be included in this study, the relevant question was removed, and the number of questions was reduced to five. Additionally, semi-structured interview questions were finalized by arranging the order in which the questions were asked and the way they were worded, in line with expert opinion.

To determine the suitability of the prepared questions for children's perceptions and development, a preliminary application was conducted with six five-year-old children in a kindergarten who were not included in the research. In this application, after the researchers introduced themselves to the children, a game was played with the children, and then six randomly selected children were chosen using the teacher's list. One of these children withdrew from the interview, and a preliminary application was carried out with five children. The researchers interviewed each child individually. Children were asked to draw pictures with instructions regarding the

main theme of the research, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with the finalized questions.

As a result of these practices, expressions in the form of imperative sentences were transformed into polite sentences. Since it was determined that some children responded more easily to inverted interrogative sentences, alternatives were created for the way questions were asked. Additionally, since it was found that children commonly used the word "poverty" instead of the word "poor," adjustments were made in the questions using this word. Consequently, the interview questions consist of a total of five questions: "What is poverty (poor)?", "Can you tell me what poverty (poor) people look like?", "Why are some people poverty (poor)?", "What should be done so that people are not poverty (poor)?", and "What would you do to change poverty people's lives (poor)?"

### **Children's drawing document**

Unlike adults, children can express their thoughts and feelings through drawing, which is an important part of their development. Fox and Schirmacher (2014) state that children can communicate their thoughts through their drawings and that children who are interested in what is going on around them can also express their experiences through their drawings. The artistic development characteristics of five-year-old children are in the "pre-schema" period. During this period, children can symbolically express what they know and experience, and they can draw what they feel and think about an object, being, or situation. They can also draw things that are important, relevant, or personally meaningful (e.g., family, pets, and friends, etc.).

In the research, before starting the interviews with the children, they were asked to draw pictures on the subject. For this purpose, the children were asked, "What is a poor family like? Think about it and draw a poor family." The directive was prepared and used.

### **The Process**

To collect the data for this study, the necessary approvals and permissions were obtained. Subsequently, the researchers visited the schools and provided the teachers with the "Family Information Form" and "Parental Informed Consent Form." The interviews with the children took place in the preschools on different days, with five-year-old children from different classes. Interviews with morning classes were conducted between 09:00 and 11:30, and interviews with afternoon classes were conducted between 13:00 and 16:00. After entering the classrooms, the researchers introduced themselves to all the children and played a game with all the participating children. Later, a quiet space designated by the school principal and teacher was selected, and one researcher sat face-to-face with one child.

Firstly, the child was briefly engaged in conversation about a topic other than the research, and their consent was obtained regarding their participation in the study.

Then, the voice recorder to be used for the interview was introduced to the child. Each child was provided with crayons, pencils, and paper, and instructed to draw a picture in line with the research's objective: "What is a poor family like? Please think and draw a picture of a poor family." The directive was explained to them. The children participating in the study were not given any guidance on what to draw. They were left to their own discretion in using crayons or pencils, and were encouraged to express themselves comfortably through their drawings. There was no time limit imposed while the children were creating their drawings. They completed their pictures in approximately 10 minutes. After each child stated that they had completed their drawing, they were asked to describe their drawing. Subsequently, the interview questions were directed to the children. The interviews, which lasted approximately 20-25 minutes, were recorded using a recording device. The audio recordings were transferred to the computer, transcribed, and transformed into written documents for analysis. For each participant child, the data were coded with pseudonyms "C1, C2, C3, ..., C24"

### **Data Analysis**

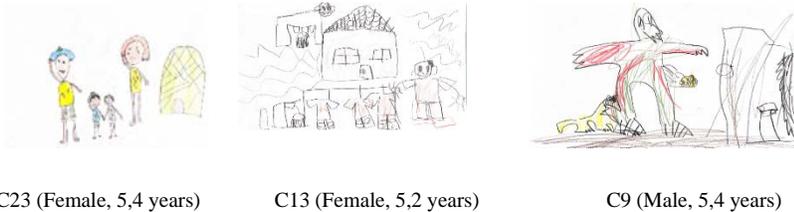
The content analysis method was used to analyze the data of the study. In the research, both the drawings made by the children and the transcribed interviews were analyzed together. In content analysis, similar data are organized and interpreted within certain concepts and themes (Yıldırım & Simsek, 2013). In the research, a deductive content analysis approach was preferred. Therefore, the drawings of the children, their descriptions of the drawings, and their responses to interview questions were conceptually defined and codes were created. In the analysis of the interviews, explicit meanings expressed by the children were sometimes incorporated, but in some cases, coding was done based on implicit meanings intended by the children. To achieve this, the data was read multiple times, considering all the speech content of the children, and codes and themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) were derived. Similarly, codes were generated for both the children's drawings and the discussions about their drawings. Various codes were identified for elements such as each geometric shape drawn by the children, depiction of figures (man/woman/child), houses, nature, environmental representation, colors used, clothing, and drawing old-new objects. The codes were grouped and conceptualized, leading to the emergence of sub-themes that could describe the phenomenon. Frequencies were generated for the identified sub-themes, and the findings were interpreted by directly citing relevant excerpts from the data based on the defined sub-themes.

In determining inter-coder reliability for data analysis, the formula "Reliability = Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement) x 100," recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994), was used. According to this formula, the agreement rate between coders was determined as 89.2%. Based on this agreement rate, it can be concluded that there is reliability among the coders.

### Findings

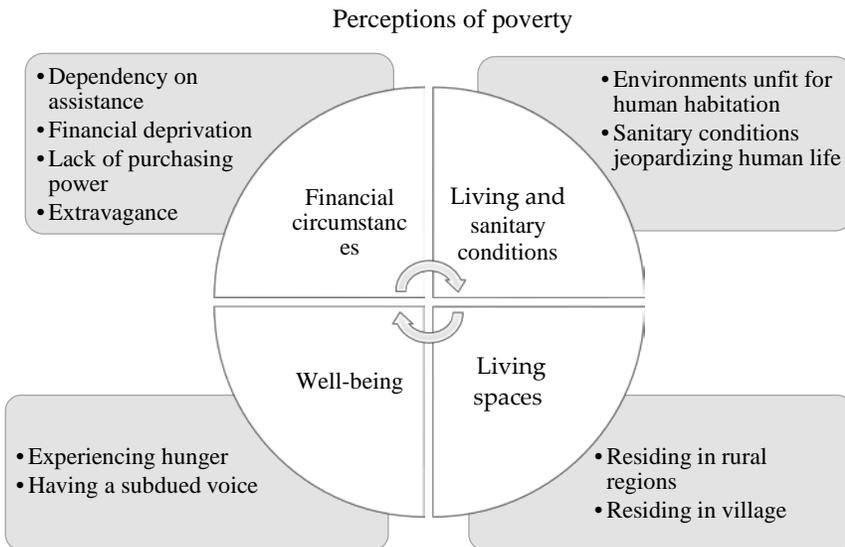
In the study, drawings were elicited from five-year-old children receiving preschool education in order to determine their perceptions and stereotypes of poverty through the lens of impoverished individuals. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the children to further explore their perspectives. The drawings made by the children and the interviews conducted with them were analyzed together.

The drawings made by the children in the study are presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Examples of children's drawings.

Through content analysis of the obtained data, themes and sub-themes were identified. The findings regarding children's perceptions of poverty are presented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Perceptions of poverty in preschool education: a study of five-year-old children's perspectives.

The analysis findings regarding the perceptions of poverty among five-year-old children who receive preschool education indicate that these children primarily associate poverty with financial circumstances, which they often explain using terms related to being dependency on assistance. According to the children, individuals who are considered poor are those who require help with clothing, food, money, and possessions more frequently than those who are not poor. Another concept closely related to financial circumstances that the children discuss is "financial deprivation." Expressions such as *"There aren't many things like that. For instance, they don't have cell phones."* (C18) used by the children to describe financial deprivation suggest that not having access to essential commodities represents poverty in their understanding. The children also mention that poverty is connected to the lack of purchasing power, as demonstrated through statements like *"They don't have much money, so they can't buy a lot of things. They can't buy a lot of food with money."* (C3). Moreover, their remarks like *"They spent too much money, so they don't have any money left."* (C12) highlight their perception that poverty relates to the inability to balance income and expenditures and the concept of extravagance.

The second theme that emerges from the analysis of the perceptions of poverty among five-year-old children is related to living and sanitary conditions. Children's expressions such as *"Their houses can't withstand the rain. Their windows always leak."* (C4), *"Houses of poor people are like this, broken and crumbling."* (C12), and *"Their houses are messy and dirty."* (C8) indicate that they do not perceive the living conditions of the poor as suitable for habitation. Moreover, based on these statements, it can be inferred that children see the homes of the poor as places that do not meet the necessary standards for human health.

Another perception of poverty among the children is associated with living spaces. The children described the poor as people living in the village. This suggests that they perceive poverty in connection with rural areas and village environments.

Lastly, the children used well-being concepts in their perceptions of poverty. When describing the characteristics of poor individuals, they used expressions like *"They are hungry"* (C11) and *"No sound, no hair"* (C21), indicating that they associated poverty with the lack of physical well-being and the inability to meet physiological needs.

The analysis of the perceptions of poverty-related stereotypes among five-year-old children receiving early childhood education revealed the findings presented in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Perceptions of poverty stereotypes among five-year-old children in early childhood education

According to Figure 3, it was determined that the most frequently repeated economic-focused stereotypes of the children regarding poor individuals were related to housing. According to the children, the poor are homeless and live on the streets. Some children expressed these views as *"They live on the streets like that"* (C6), *"The poor don't have a home, and if they do, it's in a car"* (C11), *"On the streets because they don't have a house"* (C15). The children also perceived poor individuals with houses as living in huts made of mud, straw, or tin. They believed that the houses of these poor people were not apartments but independent and old houses.

The study also revealed that the children held stereotypes about the working conditions of poor individuals. They expressed views like *"They don't go to work and can't earn money"* (C4), *"They don't do any work and don't accomplish anything"* (C8), *"They don't work"* (C22), suggesting that the poor are unemployed and lazy individuals.

Preschool children's stereotypes about poverty also include associations with the mental and physical health of poor individuals. The children perceive poor individuals as pessimistic individuals. When describing the characteristics of poor individuals, they use expressions such as *"They are sad, not happy, and won't be happy because they are poor"* (C20), *"They get angry. Let's make them laugh"* (C10), *"They look angry, like their muscles are tense"* (C1), indicating that they associate poor individuals with negative emotions and a sense of unhappiness.

The children also have stereotypes about the physical appearance of poor individuals. They believe that poor people do not pay attention to hygiene, especially describing them as not being clean. Expressions like *"They are dirty"* (C13), *"They are covered in mud"* (C4), *"Their hair is dirty"* (C14), *"They have bad, dirty hands"* (C8) show that they hold the stereotype that poor individuals have both unclean bodies and clothing.

Another stereotype children have about poor individuals is related to gender. They see poor people as males, specifically as fathers responsible for providing for the family. Expressions like *"Poor. Male. Unshaven"* (C14), *"The father of the children. He cries. Because he is poor"* (C23), *"Poor man, collecting firewood at home"* (C5) indicate that they associate poverty with male figures and fathers.

Furthermore, the children's stereotypes about poverty are influenced by cultural factors. They mostly see poor individuals as inclined towards crime. According to the children, poor people are those who harm others, damage their belongings, and need to be caught by the police. Phrases used by children: *"He threw a bomb, an invisible bomb. There is a police car (C1)"*, *"The poor are here. There are police here too (C2)"*. Additionally, they believe that poor people cannot go to school and lack education. Thus, they label poor people as uneducated. For example, *"he/she should go to school because he/she is illiterate (cannot read and write)..."*(C2), *"They should go to school."* (C7). The children also perceive poverty as an unchangeable reality and a destiny from birth, viewing poverty as an inherent state for poor individuals. One of the children expressed this thought as *"God created it. God created it that way, I don't know (C3)"*.

### Discussion and Conclusion

In this study aimed at determining how five-year-old children perceive poverty and identifying prevalent stereotypes related to poverty, the findings suggest that, according to children, individuals in poverty are those who struggle to maintain a balance between their income and expenses. These individuals consistently experience deficits in this balance, despite having a constant need for money, and they tend to spend recklessly and excessively. It is believed that this perception among children reflects a sort of societal consensus on poverty. This is aligned with the common understanding of poverty as the inability of an individual, primarily at an economic level, to meet their basic needs (Bozan, 2017).

In this study, how children perceive poverty and their stereotype judgments related to poverty were examined. According to the results, children perceive poverty in relation to financial circumstances, well-being, living environment, living and sanitary conditions. While indicators of poverty were present in the explanations of five-year-old children, they did not use explanations about the causes. This absence of causal expressions about poverty's origins in this study might stem from children's cognitive development and age, which might not allow them to establish cause-and-

effect relationships regarding poverty's underlying factors. However, in a study conducted by Kopszyska-Sikorska & Szyszka (2001) with preschool children aged five to seven in Poland, they found that children perceived poor individuals as those experiencing lack of money and food, lacking in housing and shelter, without a family, having lost a family member, facing unemployment, dealing with illnesses, and being exposed to disasters. This indicates that children, in their descriptions, attribute poverty not solely to financial inadequacy but also to various circumstances leading to it. Poverty is a multidimensional concept that varies across time, space, and individuals (Arslan & Ayhan, 2017). Thus, the diverse opinions of the participating children about poverty were identified in this context. The presence of different elements in children's definitions of poverty can be attributed to variations in age, developmental stage, and personal experiences, which can differ between countries, as observed in both studies.

Hakovirta and Kallio (2016), conducted a study aiming to determine the perception of poverty among children aged 10 to 15 years. In their research, they define children's poverty as the relative lack of certain goods and items due to the limited availability of financial resources. For this age group, children perceive poverty to entail the absence of essential elements such as home, clothing, equipment for leisure activities, or mobile phones, which are deemed necessary for non-poverty status. Conversely, impoverished children view individuals who possess outdated, second-hand, or defective belongings as impoverished individuals. The findings of this study demonstrate a similarity in how children aged five perceive poverty concerning material deprivation.

According to children aged five, poverty is a concept related to being in need of assistance, and the impoverished are individuals who require aid in the form of clothing, food, money, and other items from those who are non-poor. In Turkey, providing assistance to impoverished individuals is both a tradition and an essential teaching of the dominant Islamic religion, which may prompt children and their families to extend help to impoverished individuals in the form of food or used clothing, potentially leading impoverished individuals to express their need for aid. Furthermore, research conducted in different countries on children's perception of poverty has revealed that children do not necessarily refer to the aspect of needing assistance. This situation may be attributed to variations in poverty alleviation strategies in these countries compared to Turkey and the perception of combating poverty as a significantly important societal issue rather than leaving it solely to individual responsibility.

Another noteworthy finding is that five-year-old children associate poverty with excessive spending. In the eyes of children, impoverished individuals are not only those lacking sufficient money and resources but also individuals who mismanage their finances, leading to financial deprivation. The expressions used by children to define impoverished individuals indicate their ability to erroneously attribute poverty

to the mismanagement of money, reinforcing the notion that they can establish a misguided link between poverty and money. Tafere's (2012) research also found that children ranked extravagance as the second most common cause of poverty. For example, adults spending money on unnecessary items or indulging in multiple purchases can contribute to poverty. This result strengthens the notion that children rationalize poverty based on concrete indicators.

In Tafere's (2012) study, the expression "being deprived of suitable housing" among children's poverty definitions also shows similarities with these research findings. The children participating in the study perceived the living conditions of impoverished individuals as dwellings unsuitable for human life, encompassing features that pose a threat to human life due to unsanitary conditions.

The perception of poverty by children in relation to rural areas and villages, as depicted in the study, is significant. Poverty is a more prevalent issue in rural regions and villages in many countries, including Turkey (Erdal & Yavuz, 2013). Urban areas typically revolve around a lifestyle based on purchasing various services, and the acquisition of these services is economically rewarding. However, rural and village life often shields individuals from the economic pressures brought on by urban culture, making them more livable economic environments for impoverished individuals. Nevertheless, this perception has contributed to the enduring and significant social issue of the stereotype that "villagers are poor." As urban areas face the depletion of natural resources, living spaces are expanding towards villages and rural areas. Children's perceptions of impoverished individuals' living spaces from an early age may lead them to generalize and label even affluent villagers as poor, potentially leading to exclusion by their peers who are not from rural backgrounds.

One of the significant findings of the research is that children explain poverty in terms of not having access to a healthy life and living conditions. In children's books, representations of impoverished individuals often revolve around depictions of family members needing care and being ill (Işyar, 2009). The fact that the participating children defined poverty as being hungry and unhealthy is quite noteworthy. In Turkey, where access to education and healthcare services is theoretically "free" for every individual due to the principles of a social state, unraveling this perception becomes an important point of discussion. The representation of poverty as a hoarseness in children's perceptions is interpreted as a reflection of impoverished individuals lacking the education and economic power to make their voices heard.

The patterns identified in the research are as follows: economy-focused stereotypes (housing issues, laziness/unemployment), Well-being focused stereotypes (pessimism), stereotypes coupled with the physical appearance (uncleanliness, wearing torn or old clothes), gender- focused stereotypes (being male), and stereotypes coupled with cultural factors (being prone to crime, lack of education, fate). Inadequate fulfillment of economic needs leads to poverty. The relationship between poverty and the economy has contributed to the development of poverty

stereotypes, primarily in economic contexts. Social stereotypes play a significant role in this. According to this research, five-year-old children associate poverty with impoverished individuals living in poorly maintained houses due to economic factors, often being perceived as lazy and unemployed. Studies show that children explain the fundamental reasons for poverty through factors such as laziness, having a large family, lack of money, extravagance, and unwillingness to earn money (Tafere, 2012).

In the present-day context, the absence of basic human rights such as access to proper nutrition, suitable housing, adequate transportation, effective communication, and reliable energy sources signifies a state of human poverty. According to the concept of a social state, the government is obliged to ensure humane living conditions for all individuals. Impoverished individuals who do not sufficiently benefit from their social and economic rights can face harsh and exaggerated discrimination from other segments of society and encounter stereotypical narratives. This exclusion can manifest in rigid and exaggerated forms, reinforcing commonplace attitudes. According to the 2022 Poverty and Living Conditions Statistics provided by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), the risk of encountering poverty or social exclusion for children between the ages of 0 and 17 has been quantified at 42.7% (TÜİK, 2023). This statistical representation corroborates the prevailing societal notion that attributes poverty to personal shortcomings, implying that individual inadequacies primarily contribute to one's state of impoverishment (Aksan, 2012).

Furthermore, this overarching perspective has spawned familiar stereotypes, exemplified by familiar refrains like "Jobs are available, but they opt not to work" or "They are selective about their employment choices." These statements are rooted in the stereotype that individuals are disinclined to engage in productive labor. Unfortunately, this stereotype-driven interpretation of poverty obstructs the comprehensive tackling of the issue. It displaces responsibility from governmental institutions, inhibiting them from assuming a more significant role in confronting the multifaceted challenges related to poverty.

During early childhood, a prevailing societal culture contributes to the formation of interactions among peer groups. Within this cultural context, the values and beliefs of the society also exert influence (Gülay Ogelman, 2018). Accordingly, children from all accepted social groups in society receive approval not only from the larger community but also from their peer groups in schools. They are preferred as playmates by their peers. However, children from groups that receive less acceptance within society can face peer rejection. Especially when impoverished individuals are blamed for their poverty due to perceived individual shortcomings, this perception can extend to children's peer relationships. Children may consequently reject and exclude peers from impoverished families. In particular, the blaming of impoverished individuals for their financial circumstances, framed as their individual responsibility, can influence children's peer interactions. This can lead to children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds being rejected and marginalized by their peers.

According to the research findings, the perception of impoverished individuals as pessimistic individuals in terms of their mental health and emotional states has been acknowledged as a significant stereotype among five-year-old children. Particularly in Turkey, the prevalence of financial struggles among impoverished individuals and their constant worries about meeting basic needs to sustain their lives could potentially contribute to the formation of this stereotype among children. The continuous anxiety they experience about their future and the necessity to vocalize their needs might be factors influencing the development of this perception in children.

Another stereotype identified among children in this research is the perception that impoverished individuals wear torn, dirty clothes and appear unclean. Previous studies have indicated that children often associate impoverished individuals with uncleanliness (Woods et al., 2005) and assess the physical conditions of their living spaces as dirty, rundown, cold, and littered areas (Tafere, 2012). Children have also depicted impoverished individuals as wearing ragged, dirty clothes, old torn shoes, or walking barefoot due to their families not having money to buy soap for washing, among other things (Tafere, 2012). Although this stereotype appears related to physical appearance, it fundamentally stems from economic factors. In the view of children, the lack of adequate income for fulfilling basic cleanliness needs leads impoverished individuals to appear dirty. Similarly, not having the economic means to purchase new clothing leads them to continue wearing torn garments. Children might have witnessed instances of this nature, contributing to the development of such perceptions.

This situation prompts children to make generalizations, resulting in the development of stereotypes concerning the physical appearances of impoverished individuals. Işyar (2009) in her study titled "The Theme of Poverty in Children's Novels" asserts that poverty should not solely be associated with old, dirty, and crowded families. When analyzing the gathered data from this study, it becomes crucial to note that the children's characterization of poverty extends to encompass aspects like living in dark, sunless houses and enduring unhealthy nutrition and living conditions.

Among the stereotypes about poverty formed by five-year-old children is the association of poverty with being male. This stereotype is likely linked to the depiction of fathers as the figures responsible for providing for the family's livelihood and managing the household economy in the homes of children from middle socio-economic backgrounds who participated in the research. While women's participation in the economic sphere is increasing, Turkey remains a country that upholds traditional patriarchal family structures. As a result, men are still perceived as the ones responsible for providing for the family's financial needs and managing the income earned at home. However, according to data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) in 2022, it is evident that single mothers in Turkey also experience financial

challenges. Despite this reality, the stereotype remains prevalent due to the country's adherence to traditional patriarchal norms.

Another significant stereotype identified among five-year-old children in the research is the perception of poverty as fate. These children consider poverty an unchangeable, predestined circumstance. Viewing poverty as an inherent fate, whether one is impoverished or not, could lead to the development of inaccurate beliefs from an early age. Particularly concerning is the potential for impoverished children to internalize and accept this stereotype, hindering necessary actions for collective efforts to combat poverty, which is one of today's most pressing issues. Research by Kopczynska-Sikorska and Szyszko (2001) with children aged 6 to 14 revealed that as children grow older, their tendency to perceive poverty as fate diminishes. With age, children tend to develop beliefs that poverty can be overcome or altered. However, whether the perspective that poverty is not a result of individual shortcomings continues to evolve has not been explored. It's worth noting that this study only focuses on five-year-old children. Therefore, conducting studies on poverty with various age groups in Turkey and examining the evolution of stereotypes with age would provide significant contributions to the existing literature.

This research is confined to the perspectives of children attending schools in central district of a metropolitan city in Eastern Turkey. Upon evaluating the obtained results, determining how children perceive poverty is significant in fostering awareness of its underlying causes. This study, which examines the perceptions of five-year-old children regarding poverty and the associated stereotypes, seeks to uncover how children view societal issues. Educating children in schools about the causes of poverty can preempt inappropriate blame acceptance among impoverished children and promote understanding among their peers that being impoverished is not their fault. This is especially vital, as poverty can exacerbate stress and social exclusion among children.

Therefore, a need exists for more child-focused research to better comprehend the daily lives of impoverished children (Hakovirta & Kallio, 2016). Additionally, education programs aimed at altering entrenched societal stereotypes in children's minds can be developed, altering their perceptions or restructuring existing programs to modify poverty-related stereotypes. Combatting poverty can be achieved through cultivating the unbiased perspectives of tomorrow's adults, which can only be achieved by freeing children from the grip of societal stereotypes.

Additionally, education programs developed to change the societal stereotypes that children hold can modify their stereotypes or existing educational programs can be structured to address and alter poverty-related stereotypes. As the fight against poverty depends on the perspectives of future adults, it is essential to cultivate children's perspectives free from societal stereotypes.

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### Genişletilmiş Özet

Yoksullukla ilgili olarak bireylerin bakış açısının, algısının ve kalıp yargılarının incelenmesi, toplumsal yaşam dinamiklerinin anlamlandırılması açısından oldukça önemlidir. Toplumsallaşma sürecinde olan okul öncesi dönem çocuklarının da yoksulluk algılarının ile kalıp yargılarının belirlenmesi, toplumun yoksulluğu nasıl gördüğünün ve kalıplaşmış yargılarının çocuklar üzerindeki yansımalarının neler olduğunun belirlenmesine olanak tanıyabileceği düşünülmektedir.

Algı, çocukların daha önceki deneyimlerini ve öğrenme süreçlerini içeren bir kavramdır. Çocuklar erken yaşlarda nesnelere ile olaylarla ilgilenmekte, bunların içinden özellikle kendilerine ilginç ve farklı gelene odaklanmaktadır. Günlük deneyimler, çocukların algısal gelişimi açısından önemlidir. Bu da bilişsel gelişimin önemli bir göstergesidir. Bandura'nın sosyal öğrenme kuramına göre bilişsel, davranışsal ve çevresel etkileşimler yoluyla düşünsel ve algısal olarak gelişen çocuk, özellikle yetişkin davranışlarını gözlemleyerek ve örnek alarak öğrenme yaşantısına dönüştürmektedir. Çocuklar çevrelerinde olup bitenleri yetişkin davranışlarını taklit ederek kavramaktadır. Çocukların bu gelişimsel süreçler yoluyla yoksulluk ve zenginlik gibi kavramlara ilişkin farkındalığa sahip olduğu söylenebilir. Çocuklar yaşadıkları kültürel ve toplumsal etmenlerden etkilenmekte, sosyal sorumluluk bilincine sahip olmakta ve toplumdaki ekonomik eşitsizlikle ilgili farkındalıkları oluşmakta yoksulluğu bireysel, duygusal, ruhsal, çevresel, siyasi, dış görünüş ve ekonomik olarak algılamaktadırlar.

Bireyin, bazı toplumsal gruplar hakkındaki bilgisini, inançlarını ve beklentilerini içeren bilişsel bir yapıyı oluşturan kalıp yargılar ise, bir toplumsal grubun diğer bir toplumsal gruba karşılaştırılmasına dayanan ve gruplar arasındaki farklı özelliklerin yanlış, katı, aşırı abartılı biçimde genelleştirilmiş, basit izlenimleridir. Bireylerde kalıp yargıların gelişimine ilişkin yapılan araştırmalarda, çevresel etkenler ile sosyal etkileşiminin belirleyici olduğu ve toplumun tüm bireylerinde kalıp yargıların görülebileceği ve çocukların kalıp yargılardan daha fazla etkilendiği belirtilmektedir. Çocuklar sınırlı deneyimleri nedeniyle de kalıp yargı geliştirebilmekte karmaşık bilgileri dar kavramlara sıkıştırılmaya çalışarak anlamlandırabilmektedirler. Bu yolla çocuklar hem gelişimsel olarak kalıp yargı oluşturabilmekte hem toplumda süregelen

kalıp yargılardan güçlü biçimde etkilenmekte hem de bu kalıp yargıları benimsemektedir.

Çocukların kalıp yargıları edinmelerinde toplumsal gruplara dahil edilme ve dışlama süreçleri etkilidir. Özellikle erken çocukluk döneminden itibaren gruplara dahil edilme ölçütleri kalıp yargının getirdiği beklentilere uygun olup olmaması ile gerekçelendirilmektedir. Çocukların kalıp yargılarının daha fazla olmasının, toplumsal deneyimlerinin daha az olmasından ve ailede egemen olan anlayışların çocuğa yansıtılmasından kaynaklandığı söylenebilir. Yoksullukla ilgili kalıp yargılar uluslararası çalışmalarda zekâ, akademik başarı, sosyal yetenek, tembellik, düşük eğitim düzeyi, madde bağımlılığı, göçmenlik ya da ruhsal durum gibi bileşenleri içermektedir.

Yoksullukla ilgili çocukların kalıp yargıları çoğunlukla sosyo-ekonomik sınıfa yönelik kalıp yargılar olabilmektedir. Beş yaşından küçük çocuklarda sosyo-ekonomik kalıp yargıların daha az görülmesine karşın beş- altı yaşlarında sınıfsal olarak kalıp yargılara sahip olabilmektedirler. Bu yaş grubu çocuklar, insanları ekonomik sınıfa göre ayırabilmekte, insanların giysileri ya da görüntüleri ile onları ekonomik olarak kalıp yargılarla sınıflayabilmekte, bunu da arkadaş seçimlerine yansıtılabilmektedirler. Çocuklar altı yaşına kadar sosyal sınıflarla ilgili konularda kendilerine sorular yöneltildiğinde, bireylerin zengin ya da yoksullukları hakkında yorum yapabilmekte ve kendilerine gösterilen yetişkin fotoğraflarını sosyo-ekonomik açıdan sınıflayabilmektedirler. Özetle küçük yaşlardan başlayarak çocuklar yoksulluğun ne olduğunun farkına varmakta; beş yaşından başlayarak yoksullukla ilgi algılarıyla birlikte yoksulluğa ilişkin kalıp yargılara sahip olmaktadır.

Bu araştırmanın genel amacı okul öncesi eğitim alan beş yaş çocuklarının yoksulluk algılarını ve kalıp yargılarını incelemektir. Bu amaç doğrultusunda (1) “çocukların yoksulluğa ilişkin algıları nedir?” ve (2) “çocukların yoksulluğa ilişkin kalıp yargıları nedir?” sorularına yanıt aranmıştır.

Araştırmanın yöntemi nitel araştırma olmakla birlikte durum desenindedir. Araştırmanın katılımcı grubunu, iki farklı bağımsız ve resmi anaokuluna devam eden beş yaşındaki 24 çocuk oluşturmuştur. Veri toplama sürecinden önce etik kurul ile kurum ve ebeveyn izinleri alınmış, önceden literatür taraması sonucu hazırlanan yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşme soruları üç alan uzmanının değerlendirmesi sonucu düzenlenmiştir. Araştırmanın verileri, beş yaş çocuklarının çizimleriyle ve onlarla yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerle elde edilmiştir. Verilerin analizinde içerik analizi kullanılmıştır.

Araştırma bulgularına göre çocukların yoksullukla ilgili algıları dört tema altında toplanmıştır; mali durum, barınma ve sıhhi koşullar, sağlık ve yaşam alanı. Çocukların yoksullukla ilgili kalıp yargıları ise ekonomi, sağlık, fiziksel, cinsiyet ve kültürel etmenler odaklı kalıp yargılar olarak açığa çıkmıştır. Sonuç olarak, erken yaşlardan itibaren çocukların yoksullukla ilgili hem algıya sahip oldukları hem de toplumsal

kalıp yargıları öğrendikleri söylenebilir. Çocukların zihinlerinde yer edinen toplumsal kalıp yargıların değişmesi için geliştirilen eğitim programları ile çocukların kalıp yargıları değiştirilebilir. Hâlihazırda kullanılan eğitim programlarının içeriği yoksulluk kalıp yargılarının değiştirilmesi bağlamında yapılandırılabilir.