

Even less visible: Disadvantaged children in disadvantaged countries

Sub-optimal development in childhood is associated with a range of environmental factors including poverty and exposure to violence; and is observable in many parts of the world, even in high-income countries. In some regions, however, risk factors often co-occur, and their cumulative effect compromises children's development to a greater extent. Yet, ironically, we know and talk little about them. In this speech, I will try to draw a picture depicting psychological development and wellbeing of children in underprivileged countries. I will present findings from our research in Turkey comparing language, cognitive and social development in institution-reared children and low-SES parent-reared children, and in children who live in disadvantaged conditions characterized by prolonged extreme poverty, and familial and political conflict. I will also look at current circumstances for these children after the covid-19 pandemic, and will make suggestions about how we can make use of technology to support children's development at an early age.

Bilge Selçuk is a professor of psychology at Koc University. She received her BSc and MSc degrees from Middle East Technical University, and Ph.D. from the University of Melbourne. Her research focuses on psychological well-being and development in children living in disadvantaged contexts and in children with atypical development. She has conducted a four-years extensive research that tracked the development of institution-reared children and compared their development with parent-reared children in socioeconomically disadvantaged families in five cities in Turkey. In the context of significant migration from Syria to Turkey and severe political and armed conflict in the region, research of Prof. Selçuk has focused on the effects of prolonged poverty and war trauma on cognitive, social-emotional development and psychological wellbeing of children. The severe discrimination and maltreatment of Syrian refugees also led her to conduct research on the selective usage of cognitive and social-emotional capacities. In her recent research, Prof. Selçuk investigated the intergroups factors that are linked with the deployment of mind- and emotion-reading in children and adults, regardless of the high maturity in these capacities.