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The Representation of Children's Rights in Cumhuriyet Newspaper: A Thematic Analysis in a Socio-Political Context

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Abstract

This study examines how children's rights-themed news in the Turkish media has been shaped by socio-political contexts over time. It aims to explore the evolving visibility of children and the public awareness of their rights. Thematic analysis was conducted on news articles related to children's rights in Cumhuriyet newspaper from 1990 to 2024. The media plays a crucial role in informing the public about the protection of children and in shaping perceptions around related social issues. This study also reveals how broader socio-political dynamics are echoed in the press's depiction of childhood and child-related concerns. While the findings suggest that journalism can mobilize public support and contribute to more informed social engagement, they also highlight the need for a stronger, more sustained interaction between media and civil society to address these challenges effectively.

keywords: Child Rights, Media, Thematic Analysis

Résumé

La représentation des droits des enfants dans le journal Cumhuriyet: Une analyse thématique dans un contexte sociopolitique

Cette étude examine comment le discours médiatique sur les droits de l'enfant en Turquie s'est formé dans un contexte socio-politique au fil du temps. L'objectif principal de la recherche est de mettre en lumière l'évolution de la visibilité des enfants dans les médias ainsi que la transformation de la sensibilité de l'opinion publique à l'égard des droits de l'enfant. À cette fin, une analyse thématique a été menée sur les articles relatifs aux droits de l'enfant publiés dans le journal Cumhuriyet entre 1990 et 2024. Les résultats montrent que les médias jouent un rôle déterminant dans la construction d'une conscience sociale autour de la protection des enfants et dans la formation des perceptions liées aux problématiques de l'enfance. L'étude révèle également que des dynamiques socio-politiques de plus grande envergure – telles que les politiques éducatives et les crises économiques – se reflètent dans les représentations médiatiques de l'enfance. Si les médias disposent d'un potentiel important pour renforcer la mobilisation publique et encourager une plus grande sensibilisation sociale, les conclusions soulignent aussi la nécessité d'une interaction plus forte et durable entre les médias et la société civile afin de mieux répondre aux enjeux relatifs à l'enfance.

mots-clés: *Droits de l'enfant, Médias, Analyse thématique*

Öz

Cumhuriyet Gazetesinde Çocuk Haklarının Temsili: Sosyo-Politik Bağlamda Tematik Bir Analiz

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de çocuk hakları temalı haber söyleminin zaman içerisinde nasıl bir sosyo-politik bağlam içinde biçimlendiğini incelemektedir. Araştırmanın temel amacı, çocukların medyadaki görünürlüğünün ve kamuoyunun çocuk haklarına yönelik duyarlılığının zamanla nasıl dönüşüm geçirdiğini ortaya koymaktır. Bu doğrultuda, 1990–2024 yılları arasında Cumhuriyet gazetesinde yayımlanan çocuk haklarıyla ilişkili haber metinleri tematik analiz yöntemiyle incelenmiştir. Medyanın, çocukların korunmasına ilişkin toplumsal farkındalığın oluşmasında ve çocuklukla bağlantılı toplumsal meselelerin algılanış biçimlerinin şekillenmesinde belirleyici bir rol üstlendiği görülmektedir. Çalışma bulguları, eğitim politikaları ve ekonomik krizler gibi makro düzeydeki sosyo-politik dinamiklerin, medyada çocukluk temsilleri aracılığıyla yansıma bulduğunu ortaya koy-

maktadır. Araştırma, medyanın bu alandaki toplumsal duyarlılığı artırma ve kamu desteğini harekete geçirme potansiyeline sahip olduğunu ortaya koymakla birlikte, çocuklara ilişkin sorunların daha etkin biçimde ele alınabilmesi için medya ile sivil toplum arasında daha güçlü ve sürdürülebilir bir etkileşim gerekliliğine de dikkat çekmektedir.

anahtar kelimeler: *Çocuk Hakları, Medya, Tematik Analiz*

Introduction

Does acknowledging children's rights equate to acknowledging them as individuals with rights, and does this lead to the same societal outcomes? This research posits that signing an international convention on children's rights is not equivalent to recognizing children autonomous rights-holders. Even in discussions of children's rights, children often remain invisible as subjects. As one of the first countries to sign the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, Turkey has struggled to prioritize children in public discourse on rights. The country has yet to fully separate children's identities from those of adults, failing to recognize children as independent entities. This study aims to explore how the media portrays children and children's rights through thematic analysis of media coverage on these issues. By examining children's visibility in the media through the lens of children's rights, the research also assesses how these rights are framed within social, cultural, and political contexts. While grounded in a historical and thematic analysis, this study also seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions in media policy and child rights advocacy by offering actionable findings relevant to journalists, policymakers, and civil society actors.

The study's significance lies in its focus on discussing the societal visibility of children's rights through the media. The goal is to examine the role of the media in shaping public awareness of children's rights, the themes it emphasizes, and the language and style used in these reports. Media is an essential tool for shaping social perceptions, and understanding how news regarding children's rights violations is interpreted, what visuals or symbols are employed, and whether these reports raise awareness within society, is crucial for fostering increased societal sensitivity. Through thematic analysis of how children's rights are covered, this research will also investigate the societal implications of the language used in news coverage. Furthermore, it explores whether the media coverage of children's rights issues is solution-oriented or simply focused on portraying victimhood, and how these narratives impact societal change. The research is structured around two central questions: How does the media represent children as social actors in reports on children's righ-

ts, and how does this representation influence the visibility of children in the social sphere? In what ways do media reports on children's rights violations contribute to children's visibility in the social and political contexts?

The Agenda of Studies Linking Children to the Media

This study is grounded in social constructionism, exploring how media representations shape social realities and interact with societal structures. Goffman's (2009) theory of "performances" in social interaction highlights that media portrayals of children's rights are not merely individual reflections but social meanings constructed at the societal level. Media visibility plays a crucial role in shaping social identity and societal perception. By persistently making children's rights visible, media increases social awareness and redefines children's societal position. Foucault's (2019) analysis of power and knowledge further enriches this framework, showing how power dynamics and societal structures shape individuals through ideological systems. Media acts as a tool reinforcing these structures, with children often depicted as vulnerable, reproducing social norms and power relations without challenging them. Together, Goffman and Foucault help us understand how media not only reflects social realities but actively constructs and reinforces power relations related to children's rights.

While this study is grounded in a social constructionist theoretical framework, it is also informed by a diverse and growing body of literature that explores the intersection between children and media. Existing research in this field spans multiple domains—from media representations and digital risks to children's rights, agency, and regulatory frameworks. However, despite the richness of the literature, many reviews tend to remain descriptive, with limited critical synthesis. To move beyond a simple listing of studies, this review adopts a thematic structure to highlight major trends, conceptual tensions, and underexplored areas. The review is organized into five thematic clusters: (1) media representations of children, (2) digital media and the construction of risk, (3) children's participation and agency, (4) media literacy and regulatory gaps, and (5) international legal frameworks, particularly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. By organizing the literature thematically, this section aims to offer a more comprehensive and analytical account of how media discourse surrounding children has evolved and what gaps remain for future inquiry.

Children and Media in the Framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides a comprehensive legal and moral framework for safeguarding children's rights, including several provisions that directly and indirectly relate to the media. These provisions establish a normative foundation for evaluating how media systems

support—or fail to support—children's rights in practice. From a theoretical standpoint, the CRC emphasizes three core principles: the rights to protection, participation, and provision (or access to information). These principles are crucial for assessing the media's dual role as both a potential advocate for and a threat to children's well-being.

Article 13[1] of the CRC guarantees the child's right to freedom of expression, including the right to seek, receive, and impart information through any medium. In a media context, this entails not only protecting children's freedom to be visible and heard but also ensuring that such visibility does not lead to exploitation or harm. Article 17[2] highlights the state's obligation to encourage the media to disseminate information beneficial to the child's social, moral, and cultural development. It also mandates the protection of children from information that may be harmful to their well-being, calling for the establishment of appropriate guidelines and mechanisms. These two articles reflect the tension between media as a platform for participation and as a source of potential harm, a duality often overlooked in practice.

Articles 28[3] and 29[4] deal with education, stating that children have the right to access quality education that nurtures their fullest potential. The media, in this context, functions as an educational agent, particularly in disseminating knowledge, values, and cultural content. However, inequalities in access to educational media content—both in terms of quality and availability—raise concerns about whether this right is being equitably fulfilled.

Article 36[5] further reinforces the child's right to be protected from all forms of exploitation, including those stemming from harmful media exposure such as violence, stereotyping, and sexualization. Despite these clear mandates, media systems often fall short of upholding children's rights, either by normalizing harmful representations or failing to provide age-appropriate, empowering content.

In sum, the CRC offers a robust yet underutilized framework for holding media institutions accountable and promoting children's rights in the public sphere. The Convention's emphasis on balancing protection with participation calls for a media environment that does not merely avoid harm, but actively cultivates children's voices, agency, and development. However, the lack of effective enforcement mechanisms and regulatory oversight at the national level continues to hinder full implementation. This highlights the need for interdisciplinary collaboration among

1   The child has the right to freely express their views through all forms of media.
2   States should promote the dissemination of useful information to children through the media and take necessary measures to ensure that this information does not harm the physical and psychological development of children.
3   States should strive to improve the quality of educational programs and media content aimed at children.
4   Education should be organized in a way that strengthens children's participation in social life and enhances their cultural identity.
5   States must take the necessary measures to protect children from harmful content such as violence, sexual abuse, drug addiction, and other social dangers.

policymakers, media professionals, and child rights advocates to operationalize CRC principles within media structures. Future research must further interrogate how these legal standards translate into everyday media practices—and where they fall short.

Children's Representations in Traditional and Digital Media: Risks, Gaps, and Ethical Imperatives

Children's visibility in the media has increased over the last two decades, yet the ways in which they are represented often reflect broader societal inequalities and institutional shortcomings. The literature reveals critical patterns regarding how children are portrayed, protected—or overlooked—across both traditional and digital media environments. This section brings together key studies under three central themes: (1) Media Representation and Stereotyping, (2) Digital Media and Data Vulnerabilities, and (3) Media Literacy and Structural Interventions.

Media Representation and Stereotyping

Studies consistently show that traditional media tends to frame children through narrow, often disempowering lenses. Yüksel Özmen (2012) analyses Turkish television news and concludes that children are frequently depicted as victims of crime or abuse, with little emphasis on their resilience or agency. This kind of framing not only reinforces negative stereotypes but also violates children's right to dignity and privacy. Likewise, Şirin (2013, 2018) emphasizes that early exposure to media accelerates childhood but simultaneously exacerbates existing inequalities—especially when the content is devoid of child-sensitive perspectives.

On a global scale, media representations are similarly limited. Bhatia and Pathak-Shelat (2019), for instance, reveal how rural Indian children's media consumption is shaped by intersecting structures of caste, gender, and religion. Adult control over media access often restricts children's autonomy, reproducing traditional hierarchies. These examples underscore the broader ethical dilemma: media not only reflects societal attitudes toward children but also actively reinforces power relations that marginalize them.

Digital Media and Data Vulnerabilities

With the advent of digital platforms, new ethical and regulatory concerns have emerged. Scholars like Özcan (2023) and Serin (2019) highlight the risks associated with children's exposure to commercial content, especially on platforms like YouTube, where advertisements often override educational value and privacy considerations. In particular, the practice of "sharenting"—where parents share images and data of their children online—has garnered significant critique. Çimke

et al. (2018), Dursun (2019), and Akkoç and Kuzlu Ayyıldız (2022) warn that sharenting exposes children to long-term digital identity threats, including cyberbullying and psychological harm. These findings point to critical gaps in regulation, public awareness, and ethical responsibility, both at the family and institutional levels.

Media Literacy and Structural Interventions

Many scholars call for increased media literacy as a remedy to the challenges posed by both traditional and digital media. Notley and Dezuanni (2019) show that young people, especially in Australia, face difficulties navigating digital news environments and verifying information. In Turkey, Tokuç and Duyan (2021) emphasize the need for parental education to ensure safe media consumption for children. However, as Şirin (2018) argues, media literacy must be grounded in a rights-based framework—one that equips children and adults alike with the tools to critically evaluate and produce media content.

Beyond individual interventions, there is a growing recognition of the need for systemic change. Güngör (2021) and Genç & Güner (2016) argue for increased sensitivity in media production processes, calling for editorial reforms that place children's well-being and voices at the center. Recent studies by Vescovi (2024) and Frizzo (2024) further stress the importance of co-creating media environments with children, advocating participatory frameworks that move beyond passive consumption toward active engagement.

Archival Research on Media, Childhood, and the Reproduction of Ideologies

A growing body of archival and content analysis-based research reveals that media representations of children are not merely descriptive but ideologically charged constructions that reproduce societal hierarchies. These studies situate the portrayal of children within broader political, cultural, and structural dynamics, offering a valuable historical lens through which to examine evolving role of media in children's lives can be examined.

Children are often depicted in traditional media as passive subjects—either as victims of violence or as sources of social deviance. Tutar (2014) and Dolar & Koran (2021), for instance, demonstrate how news coverage in Turkey and Northern Cyprus marginalizes children by focusing on sensational cases and excluding their voices. Similarly, Maydell (2018) critiques how child abuse is racialized in some Western media, thereby diverting attention from systemic social issues and framing abuse as a problem specific to ethnic communities. These findings suggest that even media advocacy for children's rights can inadvertently reinforce dominant ideologies when structural inequalities are ignored.

Contextual factors also play a pivotal role in shaping media narratives. Niner et al. (2013) found that Malaysian media's focus on extreme abuse cases overlooked the underlying socio-political conditions that perpetuate violence against children. Such studies highlight the need to move beyond event-based reporting to more structural and systemic critiques of childhood in media.

In contrast to the often rigid portrayals found in traditional media, new media platforms offer more participatory possibilities. Williams et al. (2024), for instance, discuss TalkLife, an online platform that enables young users to share experiences of trauma and seek peer support. Yet they caution that digital spaces must go beyond emotional catharsis and be embedded within stronger legal, psychological, and social service infrastructures to ensure meaningful protection and advocacy.

There is also a growing call for including children as active participants in media research and content creation. Livingstone (2016) underscores the need for participatory methodologies and impact assessments in the digital age to ensure children's voices are not only heard but also taken seriously in shaping policy. Himma-Kadakas and Tenor (2022) echo this sentiment in their comparative study of Sweden and Estonia, arguing that children are still predominantly portrayed as victims rather than as social agents, and that newsrooms need updated ethical guidelines that reposition children as legitimate news subjects. Similarly, Kaziaj (2016) critiques Albanian media for its adult-centric framing of children, which suppresses the expression of children's rights and agency.

The implications of such representational practices are not just symbolic but deeply material. Weatherred and Moscowitz (2024), for example, analyze how sensationalized media coverage of child abduction cases influences parental perceptions of community safety and crime, potentially distorting public understanding and policy priorities.

Overall, archival and empirical studies make a compelling case for reframing the relationship between media and children. They demonstrate that children's visibility in media cannot be separated from broader ideological structures and call for a dual approach that combines rights-based regulation with ethical representation. Integrating children's rights discourse with media studies not only expands the analytical framework but also opens space for concrete interventions in journalism, policymaking, and digital governance.

Methodology

This study adopts reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to examine how children's rights are represented in Cumhuriyet newspaper articles published between 1990 and 2024. Thematic analysis was chosen not merely as a method for identifying recurrent content, but as a framework to explore how media discourse constructs social meanings and ideologies surrounding childhood. The research is rooted in qualitative epistemology, specifically within a social constructionist paradigm, which assumes that representations of children in the media are not neutral but ideologically and contextually produced.

While the study includes frequency counts (e.g., number of articles per theme or year), these serve a descriptive, contextual function and are not used for statistical inference. The purpose of such counts is to map the visibility and discursive salience of themes over time rather than to quantify meaning. Therefore, the study does not conflate thematic analysis with content analysis but maintains a clear qualitative orientation by focusing on interpretative depth, discursive patterns, and socio-political framing.

Sampling and Data Collection

The dataset consists of 751 articles sourced from the digital archives of Cumhuriyet, selected through a systematic, keyword-based search using terms such as çocuk hakları (children's rights), çocuk istismarı (child abuse), çocuk işçiliği (child labor), çocuk ve medya (children and media), and mülteci çocuklar (refugee children). These keywords were developed inductively from a preliminary reading of the archive and deductively based on existing literature on children's rights in the media. Inclusion criteria required that articles explicitly reference children's rights or directly relate to the protection, representation, or participation of children in social or political discourse. Both full-page features and shorter news items were included. Screenshots of articles were saved year by year, then imported and coded using MAXQDA (2024 version).

Analytical Strategy

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-step framework:

- Familiarization: All articles were read multiple times to gain an immersive understanding of the content.
- Initial Coding: Meaningful units of text were coded inductively using in vivo and descriptive coding strategies.
- Theme Development: Codes were clustered into preliminary themes using an iterative process.
- Reviewing Themes: Themes were refined by re-evaluating their internal coherence and relevance to the research question.

- Defining and Naming Themes: Themes were named based on the dominant discourses and ideological patterns they reflected.
- Writing Up: In this stage, selected excerpts from the data were used as representative quotations to illustrate theme construction and contextual meaning.

A two-stage thematic approach was employed:

- The first stage was descriptive, organizing themes by surface-level content and identifying dominant tropes (e.g., victimization, abuse, poverty).
- The second stage was interpretative, examining how these representations reflect, reinforce, or challenge social structures, ideological positions, and historical events in Turkey (e.g., policy reforms, refugee crises, legislative changes, media regulation debates).

Reflexivity and Reliability

To ensure analytical rigor and reflexivity:

- A reflexive journal was maintained to document analytical decisions and potential researcher biases.
- Although no formal inter-coder reliability was conducted (consistent with reflexive thematic analysis principles), peer debriefing was employed: another researcher reviewed the codebook and sample coded segments to ensure consistency of interpretation.
- The themes were not prioritized solely by frequency, but by their ideological salience, discursive centrality, and thematic saturation in the data.

Justification of Media Selection

The decision to focus exclusively on Cumhuriyet was deliberate. As a historically significant, secular-left, oppositional newspaper, Cumhuriyet provides a unique perspective on how progressive media construct narratives of children's rights. Its consistent critical stance toward government policies also offers rich material for analyzing the interplay between media ideology, social reform discourse, and rights-based reporting. While this limits the generalizability of the findings to other media types (e.g., pro-government or tabloid outlets), it allows for a deeper, context-specific analysis of ideological media production.

Future research should expand this scope to include media diversity—particularly conservative and digital media—to capture the full spectrum of children's rights representations across Turkey's media ecosystem.

Limitations of Focusing on Cumhuriyet Newspaper for Thematic Analysis

This study uses thematic analysis to examine news articles on children's rights published in Cumhuriyet newspaper from 1990 to 2024. Thematic analysis, a qualitative research method, identifies recurring themes, patterns, or meaningful categories within a dataset. It is widely applied to qualitative data such as text, interviews, surveys, and observations. This method allows for the systematic exploration of data, enabling researchers to categorize and interpret large volumes of information (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is particularly suited to this study, as it uncovers underlying themes and patterns within substantial textual datasets, which is essential for analyzing historical and complex social issues like children's rights.

Thematic analysis consists of several key stages. Initially, data is thoroughly reviewed, and broad impressions are formed. Next, significant data segments are identified and coded, tagging specific words, phrases, or passages to represent broader meanings. These codes are organized into themes, which are then merged based on the overall structure, consistency, and meaning of the dataset (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). To ensure transparency, detailed steps on how themes were prioritized or selected will be provided.

The research data was collected via an e-subscription to Cumhuriyet and a systematic search of the newspaper archives, resulting in the analysis of 751 articles. During data collection, full-page articles and individual news stories were captured and stored by year. The collected data was imported into MaxQda (2024 version) for analysis. Articles were coded by their titles and categorized based on both content and headlines. Each category represents a significant social issue, with some overlapping. While the study classified each article under a single code for simplicity, future research may benefit from more nuanced categorizations to account for intersectionality.

This study focuses on Cumhuriyet newspaper, providing an in-depth analysis of one influential media outlet. The choice of Cumhuriyet was motivated by its long-standing history and prominent role within Turkey's media landscape. Its extensive archive spanning over three decades allows for the observation of long-term thematic continuity and historical trends concerning children's rights coverage. This is a key advantage, as it offers insights into the evolution of social discourses and media representations over time.

However, focusing on a single newspaper introduces certain limitations. The findings may not be fully generalizable to other media outlets or the broader media environment in Turkey, where political and ideological diversity among news sources is substantial. Cumhuriyet's ideological position — rooted in a left-wing, Kemalist, and critical stance — shapes its journalistic framing, often emphasizing social inequalities, human rights, and advocacy for marginalized groups, including children.

This ideological lens both enriches the analysis and limits the representation of alternative perspectives, particularly those from right-leaning or pro-government media.

Furthermore, Cumhuriyet's anti-government editorial stance and commitment to social reform affect how children's rights issues are portrayed, potentially leading to more critical and advocacy-oriented reporting. While this enhances the depth of coverage on social justice issues, it may also introduce biases that should be acknowledged. Future research should incorporate newspapers with differing political affiliations and include digital and social media platforms to capture a more comprehensive and diverse range of narratives related to children's rights.

In conclusion, while the focus on Cumhuriyet offers valuable longitudinal insights, it is essential to contextualize the findings within its political and ideological framework. This study underscores the need for developing journalism practices and media policies that are more attuned to children's rights across the ideological spectrum, advocating for ethical guidelines, child-sensitive reporting manuals, and improved content monitoring mechanisms. Transparency regarding the newspaper's biases and editorial policies will strengthen the validity and reliability of future research on media representations of children's rights.

Findings

The findings are presented through three main figures: hierarchical code-subcode map, code matrix, word cloud.

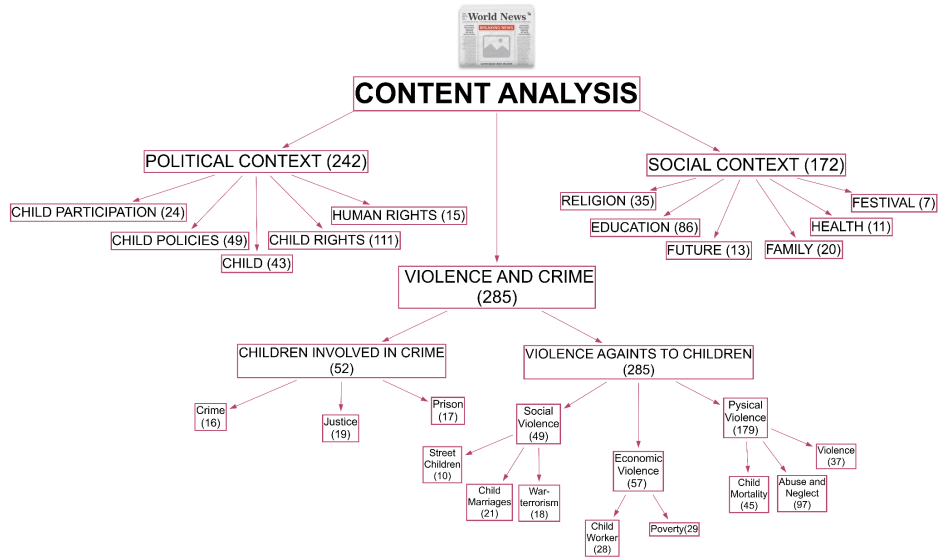**Figure 1.** Hierarchical Code-Subcode Map

Figure 1 presents the hierarchical code map structured around three main categories: political context, social context, and violence and crime. The political context includes subcodes such as child participation, policies, and rights, reflecting Turkey's evolving legal frameworks like the CRC and related reforms. The social context covers themes like religion, education, family, and health, highlighting socio-cultural dynamics influencing children's lives and media portrayals. Violence and crime are divided into children involved in crime (e.g., imprisonment, justice) and violence against children, further categorized as social, economic, and physical violence. These focus areas reveal persistent social inequalities, with peaks in war and terrorism coverage corresponding to specific crises, demonstrating media's role in addressing urgent societal issues.

However, while these categories are clearly defined, a more in-depth exploration of how and why certain themes became prominent over time would enrich the findings. For example, the increasing prominence of "child rights" and "education" in recent years could be linked to societal shifts, legal reforms, or global campaigns such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Explaining these temporal shifts in a more critical manner would provide a clearer understanding of the underlying factors influencing these trends, such as government policy changes, advocacy efforts, or international influences.

Figure 2. Code Matrix: Annual Theme Frequency and Temporal Changes

Themes/Year	1990	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	T
Poverty	1				2		3										1	3			1	1	2		1			1	2	1		4	3	2	1	29
Child Worker			1						1									4	1			3			5	1	1	1		5	1	2	1		1	28
Street Children						8																1					1									10
Child Marriages																	1	1			2	1	1	1					10		1	1	1		1	21
War-terrorism					1	1													2	3	1		1		4	1	2		1			1				18
Child Mortality			1		1	2											1	1	1		1	4		2	9	3	1	3	2		1	3			9	45
Abuse and Neglect							1			1	1	1		1	5	5	6	2	2	5	4	4	3	2	12	1	20	2	5	2	3	4	5		97
Violence					3	2			1						2				3		4			2	2	2	3	1	6	2	2		2	2	37
Crime			1				1		2	1				2					2				1	1					1	1		2	1		16
Justice	1		4													1					1	4	3		1		1	1					2	1	19
Prison			1					1												1			1	1	1	5	2		3	1				17
Child Participation		1			1	1		1	1										1			3	2		1				7	3					24
Child Policies			3				3	1				1			2	5		1	3	3	1	1	1					2	14	3	4		49
Child	3	3							1			1			3	3	2		5	4	3	1	3	3	1	2	1	1		2			43
Child Rights	4	2	7	5	6	4	2	3	2	2	1	1	3	3	2	1	1	3	3	2	4	3	9	1	6	5	4		4	5	1	4	4	2	3	111
Human Rights	1		3		3	1			1												1		3	1					1				1	15
Future											1									1	1	1		1		2		1		1	3	13
Festival			2				1										1	1					1		1						7
Religion																	3		1	2	2	2				2	2	1	5	1	4	4	4	35
Family				1		2	1				1						1					1			1		2	2	1	1	1		3	20
Education	5		1		2	9		4	1		1		2	3	5	1	2	6	1	4	6	5	2	6	1		4	4	1	1		3	6	86
Health	1		1	1																		1				1		2			2	2	11
Total	16		10	22	16	14	17	18	8		11	4	4	6	5	4	5		21	29	20	21	21	41	34	27	36	36	25	20	54	38	25	27	34	28	49	751

Figure 2 illustrates the emerging themes on an annual basis and how they have evolved over time. Poverty is one of the most frequent codes, appearing 29 times in total. Poverty stands out as a long-term issue, particularly in the context of children's rights and social inequalities. Its persistence in media discourse often correlates with periods of economic hardship or political debates around social welfare policies, indicating that economic inequality remains a key barrier to realizing children's rights. Abuse and Neglect appears with significant frequency, 97 times, highlighting a key theme in children's rights. Awareness of

and solutions for child abuse and neglect may have increased over time, possibly influenced by advocacy efforts, legal reforms, or societal shifts in attitudes towards child protection. However, the frequency alone does not reveal how deeply these issues are interrogated or connected to systemic problems such as poverty, legal enforcement gaps, or cultural taboos. Child Rights has been used 111 times, making it a particularly notable theme. This suggests a growing societal awareness regarding the protection and improvement of children's rights. Education appears 86 times, occupying a significant position. The right to education is a central theme in terms of children's development and addressing societal inequalities, which is consistent with global trends in the literature. Linking the increased media attention to education with specific reforms or political movements in Turkey would further deepen the analysis, showing how media discourse both reflects and influences public priorities.

Overall, the themes of Child Rights, Poverty, and Education appear to have been more prominent throughout the years. Notably, in recent years (post-2010), there has been a significant increase in the number of articles related to children's rights, likely influenced by growing global awareness and the impact of international organizations. It would be critical to analyze how much of this increase stems from international advocacy versus domestic political shifts or media agenda-setting practices. Themes such as Child Worker, Child Participation, and Child Policies have a narrower focus but have become more prevalent, particularly in the 2000s. These themes may reflect a more specific societal or political focus on children's agency and participation, potentially influenced by evolving child labor laws or educational reforms. Themes like War-Terrorism and Child Mortality, while emphasized during specific years, have generally remained at lower levels in recent years. This could be due to a reduction in the impact of wars or the fact that these issues have become less prominent when compared to other social challenges. Examining how media priorities shift in response to political stability or conflict would clarify these trends. Child Marriages have appeared less frequently over time (only 21 times in total), possibly reflecting the influence of changes in laws and cultural shifts in some countries. An important consideration here would be the role of social and legal reforms in decreasing the prevalence of these issues in the media, as well as how media representation may lag legal and social changes. Themes such as Child Policies and Abuse and Neglect have gained prominence over the years, indicating increased reforms in child rights and social services and greater attention to these issues. Contextualizing these patterns alongside Turkey's political reforms and NGO activities would add explanatory power to the findings.

Family and Religion themes have shown occasional increases, but they are primarily discussed in cultural and social contexts. While these themes are important, it would be beneficial to further explore how they intersect with broader socio-political or economic issues, such as poverty, education, and state policies, to offer a more nuanced understanding of their role in children's rights

discourse. Codes like Street Children and Child Participation are more niche and specific, yet they indicate an increasing awareness of the need for greater visibility of children in society. Terms like Justice and Prison reflect analyses related to societal inequalities and legal issues. These data demonstrate that awareness of children's rights has increased over time, with particular emphasis on themes such as children's rights, education, poverty, and child protection in recent years. Additionally, topics such as child labor, child policies, and children's participation in society have also become more widely discussed in recent years. Future analyses would benefit from linking these themes to specific legislative milestones, political changes, or major social campaigns to better understand their evolution and media framing.

Figure 3. Word Cloud: Most Frequently Used Terms

Figure 3 displays the most frequently used terms in the analyzed articles. The word cloud presented above was generated based on the most frequently occurring terms in news content related to children. This visualization offers a concise yet powerful representation of the dominant discourses shaping the public portrayal of child-related issues within socio-political narratives.

Notably, the most prominent terms "violence," "crime," "child," "sexual," "worker," and "human" suggest that media coverage tends to focus heavily on violence against children, sexual exploitation, child labor, and broader human rights violations. These findings underscore the persistent framing of children as vulnerable subjects situated within intersecting axes of harm and exploitation.

In addition, the recurrence of terms such as "neglect," "abuse," "physical," "rape," "poverty," "justice," and "political" reflects the structural and systemic dimensions of the challenges faced by children. The frequency of such terms points to the politicization of childhood, whereby children's rights are deeply entangled with issues of inequality, governance, and social justice.

Words like "education," "rights," "social," "contract," "policy," and "religion" further illustrate the normative and institutional contexts within which child rights are negotiated and contested. These terms indicate that while violations are often individualized and dramatized in the media, there is also a latent acknowledgment of the broader policy and cultural frameworks that shape children's lives.

Overall, the word cloud serves as a meaningful analytical tool, revealing the discursive landscape surrounding child rights in news media. It highlights not only the prevalence of protection-oriented narratives but also the urgent need for structural, rights-based approaches to address the root causes of harm. This reinforces the argument that child rights cannot be isolated from the wider socio-political conditions in which they are situated and must be understood as part of ongoing struggles for justice, equity, and human dignity.

The frequency of the Rights code illustrates the study's strong association with themes such as children's rights and human rights and suggests that legal or societal violations of rights have been examined in this context. The emphasis on human rights underscores the importance of legal frameworks and policy changes in shaping media narratives about children's rights. The frequent use of the Crime and Abuse codes implies that the research addresses violence, children's rights violations, and social problems. These codes draw attention to the ongoing violations children face, as well as how criminal justice systems and social services respond to these issues.

The crimes and mistreatment children suffer are among the key topics explored in the study. The impact of economic conditions and poverty on children's rights also emerges as an important theme, as indicated by the frequency of these codes. This is an area where further analysis could be valuable—specifically, how economic inequality intersects with violence and rights violations, and how these issues have evolved over time. The presence of terms like Neglect and Torture highlights the focus on serious mistreatment, physical or psychological violations, underscoring the examination of the more severe aspects of children's rights violations. Education, particularly in relation to children's development and social equality, is a critical area. The frequency of these codes indicates that the education system is an important subject explored in the context of children's rights. This could also be explored in relation to broader socio-political changes, such as education reform and the push for universal access to education. The impact of social factors on children's rights is evident in the study's emphasis on how children interact with their social environments and societal structures. Similarly, the frequent use of the Sect term suggests that religious groups or sects are examined as a form of children's rights violation.

Children's rights are intrinsically linked to state policies and laws. The presence of Political and State codes signals an investigation into how the state addresses children's rights and the impact of policies on these rights. Exploring how governmental policies evolve and influence media narratives could shed light on the broader social forces shaping children's rights discourse. The rare inclusion of serious crimes such as Sexual Abuse and Rape emphasizes a focus on highlighting such rights violations. These codes underscore the severe social issues children face, such as exploitation, poverty, and other challenging conditions. A deeper analysis of why these issues is highlighted less frequently could offer insights into societal taboos, legal barriers, or media constraints that affect how certain violations are represented.

Discussion

This study examines how child rights-themed news in Turkey's media has evolved within a socio-political framework, focusing on the increasing visibility of children and their rights. Using thematic analysis, it reviews Cumhuriyet newspaper articles from 1990 to 2024, linking emerging themes to changing socio-political contexts. Findings indicate a gradual rise in awareness, with education, rights violations, and violence-related issues gaining prominence over time.

However, the findings largely rely on descriptive data and do not sufficiently explore the underlying reasons behind the increasing prominence of certain themes, such as why child rights or education emerged as more prominent issues in the 2000s and beyond. A more critical analysis of the socio-political events, policy changes, or international influences that might have contributed to these shifts would provide a deeper understanding of the evolution of these themes.

This study aims to compare thematic changes related to child rights, violence, and crime with existing literature, focusing on children's increasing social visibility and evolving awareness. While prior research emphasizes state policies, social factors, and digital media's role, this study centers on traditional media representations. The findings generally align with literature trends but also highlight differences, suggesting that incorporating the impact of digital media and social platforms could offer a more comprehensive understanding of media's influence on public awareness.

In the literature, it is emphasized that awareness regarding the protection of child rights has increased, supported by innovative international policies (Lansdown, 2011; UNICEF, 2015). Since the 1990s, there has been a notable increase in awareness of child rights, and after the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a global movement in this area has been observed. The study's findings confirm increased attention to child rights since 2010, reflected in a rise in related news coverage. This trend aligns with

growing global awareness, alongside greater emphasis on child participation, policies, and rights-focused research. Laws and reforms in this area offer a significant insight into how state policies have integrated children's rights (Sinclair, 2004). The study also shows that themes like child participation and child policies gained more prominence, especially in the 2000s. This aligns with trends in the literature, highlighting the increasing reforms and social awareness regarding children's rights.

While the increasing visibility of child rights is aligned with the broader global shift towards recognizing children's agency, it is important to critically examine how these themes have been represented in the media. For instance, the study focuses on a single newspaper, Cumhuriyet, which may not capture the diversity of media narratives on child rights across Turkey. Focusing on a wider range of media outlets (e.g., television, online platforms) would allow for a more nuanced understanding of how child rights are portrayed in different media formats and how these portrayals influence public opinion and policy decisions.

The exposure of children to violence and crime has been a significant area of research in the literature for many years. Types of violence are typically categorized into three main areas: physical violence, social violence, and economic violence (Graham-Bermann & Edleson, 2001; Finkelhor et al., 2009). The frequent appearance of the violence code in this study highlights its significance as a persistent social issue within child rights violations. Similarly, the prominence of abuse and neglect reflects increasing awareness of children's physical and psychological harm. However, the descriptive findings do not fully capture how media portrayals of violence evolve or why certain types (e.g., physical vs. economic violence) dominate coverage. A deeper analysis of the influence of political contexts, global events, and policy changes on media narratives would enhance understanding of these patterns.

The literature often links the trauma experienced by child victims of violence to social factors such as poverty, lack of education, and familial issues (Kitzmann et al., 2003). This study finds poverty frequently highlighted and strongly linked to violence and child rights violations. The prevalence of violence and crime themes indicates that such violations are rooted in social structures and state policies. Particularly, children's association with crime and the justice system reveals how state labeling and legal injustices affect their lives. Further research should critically examine how media frames structural issues like poverty and education access, and how these narratives influence public understanding and policy-making on child rights violations.

Education is a critical factor for both the individual development of children and their ability to combat social inequalities. In the literature, studies on the right to education hold significant importance, and this area consistently remains a priority in the context of child rights (UNICEF, 2018). In this study, the high

frequency of the education code indicates that the right to education plays a central role in ensuring children have equal opportunities and can secure a more just position in society. The right to education is not only crucial for children's development but also for overcoming social inequalities. However, the discussion of education could benefit from a more nuanced consideration of how media narratives around education intersect with broader societal debates about educational reform, access, and equality. The study could also explore how media coverage of education impacts public opinion and how these portrayals contribute to shaping policy decisions regarding education for marginalized children. The family is another essential factor in children's development. Although the family theme occasionally emerged in this study, it was generally overshadowed by other social factors. However, there is a consensus in the literature that family structure directly impacts children's psychosocial development (Belsky, 2006). Factors such as violence, abuse, and neglect within the family are considered fundamental elements that diminish children's quality of life.

Family-related issues, especially abuse and neglect, are crucial areas of concern when discussing children's rights. However, further research could explore the role of the family in shaping children's rights violations, especially how different family structures are portrayed in the media. For example, how do media outlets frame single-parent households or families experiencing economic hardship in the context of child abuse or neglect? A more in-depth exploration of this could provide greater insight into how societal attitudes towards the family influence the media's representation of child rights.

While themes like war-terrorism and child mortality were more emphasized during certain years, this study reveals that these issues have become less prominent in recent years. Regarding war and terrorism, the literature has shown that the impact of these issues on children has been a broad research area, with many studies addressing the consequences of armed conflict on children's lives (Machel, 1996). This study observes a recent decline in the frequency of war- and terrorism-related themes, possibly due to reduced conflict impacts or the prioritization of other urgent social issues. This shift may reflect changes in geopolitical dynamics and public focus. Investigating how media prioritize topics based on political and social events—such as diminished war coverage during peacetime or economic crises—would deepen understanding of media's role in shaping public and policy agendas. A critical analysis of media topic selection over time is essential for comprehending these dynamics.

The findings of this study largely align with existing literature on child rights, violence, and crime, confirming increased awareness of children's rights and ongoing threats from violence and crime. Analyses also emphasize the importance of education, family, and social factors in protecting children and addressing inequalities. Recent years show growing attention to children's social participation and education, while the impact of war and

terrorism has lessened. Despite offering valuable insights into Turkish media discourse, the study is limited by its focus on a single outlet. Expanding the media sample and critically examining socio-political influences could deepen understanding of how child rights are portrayed. Future research should investigate the relationship between media representations, policy-making, and public attitudes amid evolving global and national contexts.

Policy Implications and Practical Recommendations

While this study identifies key patterns in how children are portrayed in the media, it emphasizes the need to interpret these representations through a child rights-based lens. Media narratives often focus on violence, abuse, and poverty, reducing children to victims and obscuring their agency. Beyond contributing to academic debate, the study seeks to guide transformative media practices through concrete recommendations.

For journalists, it is essential to portray children not just as news subjects but as individuals with agency. Coverage should avoid re-victimizing language and protect children's identities. Professional journalism bodies should establish ethical, child rights-centered editorial guidelines. For policymakers, institutions like RTÜK and the Press Council should be authorized to monitor children's representation in the media and ensure accountability. Media literacy programs emphasizing children's rights should be included in school curricula to foster critical engagement and self-expression. Evaluation criteria for media content must be aligned with a rights-based approach. For civil society, stronger collaboration with media outlets is needed to amplify children's voices. Regular monitoring reports and the creation of digital platforms where children can share their experiences would support participatory and accountable media practices.

These recommendations aim to improve children's media representation and strengthen the visibility and protection of their rights. Media should be seen as an active agent of social change, not just a mirror of society. Although Cumhuriyet promotes a rights-based approach, the absence of children's voices reveals missed opportunities for transformative practices. Children are often depicted as passive victims, reflecting a lack of participatory content centered on their experiences. Coverage also focuses mainly on problems, neglecting solutions. Therefore, media must amplify children's voices, encourage participation, and adopt a solution-oriented approach to build a genuinely child-friendly media environment.

Conclusion

This study explores how child rights-themed news in Turkey's media has been shaped within a socio-political context and examines how awareness of children's visibility and rights has evolved over time. The findings indicate that in recent years, themes such as child rights violations, violence, and crime have gained more prominence in the media, and there has been an increased societal awareness of these issues. Key themes like child rights violations, violence, poverty, and education have been frequently highlighted in news stories, suggesting that children have become more visible as social actors. However, it is not only the increasing presence of these themes in the media, but also the important role they play in shaping public perception. The growing sensitivity towards child rights and issues like violence reflects a broader societal awareness and consciousness.

The way the media covers child rights plays a determining role in accelerating social change and raising public awareness. The increasing prominence of issues like child rights and violence in the media has opened up a deeper discussion about how these themes are connected to social structures and state policies. However, a critical question arises here: should the media merely highlight the problems related to child rights, or should it also take steps to address solutions? While focusing on human rights violations can raise awareness about the structural dimensions of these problems, the failure to present potential solutions can lead to the deepening of social inequalities.

For the media to focus more on solutions and raise greater awareness of the social issues threatening children's lives would represent an important step toward addressing social inequalities. However, this step should not be limited to simply making these issues visible but should also necessitate concrete actions to reshape state policies and social structures in a fairer way. In this regard, the media must move beyond being a tool for reporting rights violations, and become an active player in advocating for children's rights. Because the protection of children's rights cannot be guaranteed solely through legal regulations, but also requires widespread awareness, which can be fostered through societal consciousness and the media.

In conclusion, child rights news in Turkey's media not only makes the issues children face more visible but also sheds light on how these issues are influenced by social structures, cultural norms, and ideological approaches. For the media to adopt a deeper, more participatory, and solution-oriented approach to child rights is one of the most important steps toward societal change and equality.

To move beyond theoretical contribution, this study also aims to offer practical insights for various stakeholders including policymakers, journalists, and child rights advocates. The findings reveal persistent patterns in how children are portrayed—often as passive victims, future citizens, or as part of social prob-

lems—which signals the need for media policies that prioritize child-sensitive and rights-based reporting frameworks. This includes the development of editorial guidelines that promote the ethical representation of children, emphasizing their agency, diversity, and voices. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of integrating child rights into journalism education and newsroom training programs, equipping journalists with the skills to report on children's issues with greater sensitivity and contextual awareness. For advocacy groups, the recurring themes and framing strategies identified in the media coverage can serve as a resource for evidence-based campaigns that aim to challenge harmful stereotypes, hold media institutions accountable, and promote the inclusion of children as active subjects in news narratives. By mapping long-term trends, the study offers a historical lens through which current media practices can be critically evaluated and reformed.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Future research can address the limitations of this study by incorporating a wider variety of media sources, including television, digital news platforms, and social media, which increasingly shape public discourse. A comparative analysis between mainstream, alternative, and state-affiliated media could provide deeper insights into how ideological leanings influence the portrayal of children's rights. Moreover, future studies should consider participatory approaches that include children not only as subjects of representation but also as informants and co-researchers. Engaging children through interviews, workshops, or media diaries could offer valuable perspectives on how they perceive their representation and the impact it has on their lives. Such an approach would also align with the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly the right to participation. In doing so, future research could move beyond discourse analysis and contribute to more inclusive, child-centered media scholarship that reflects children's lived experiences and voices.

This article has been scanned by plagiarism detection softwares. No plagiarism detected.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interest

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