

INVESTIGATION ON THE LEVELS OF CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN FAMILY FOOD PURCHASING PROCESS¹

Fatma Deniz*

Associate Prof. Dr. Seher Ersoy Quadir**

ABSTRACT

Today, children constitute an important consumer group as they influence their families' buying and spending patterns. We conducted a survey to understand levels of children's participation in family food purchasing process. The sample group for the survey consisted of 258 parents (154 mothers and 104 fathers) from Aksehir town of Konya province. Children's participation levels in the process of purchasing the food for their families, were examined at the three stages of "shopping planning", "shopping action" and "act of buying." According to the testimonies of parents, their children participated in half of the "act of buying" (50.4%), in more than half of the "shopping action" (56.6%), but only 33.4% participated in "shopping planning" stage. Further, we analyzed the relation between the independent variables and children's participation by "Pearson Correlation Coefficient."

According to mothers their children participated in the "act of buying" stage more when accompanied by them than by their fathers ($p < 0.05$). Age of either the accompanying mother ($p > 0.05$) or father ($p > 0.05$) made no difference to the level of participation by their children during the three-phases shopping. The level of participation of children during all three stages of shopping increased with the accompanying mother's level of

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* Selçuk University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Child Development and Home Management, Department of Nutrition Education Graduate Degree

** Necmettin Erbakan University, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Social Services, Konya; Turkey

education ($p < 0.05$). Only during the "purchase action" stage, a decrease in the accompanying father's level of education caused an increase in the level of participation of children. During the stage of "purchase action" three and four-person families allowed greater participation by children during "shopping action" than larger families did ($p < 0.05$). Finally, the level of participation increased during the "act of buying" for families with higher income ($p < 0.001$).

Key Words: *purchasing stages, shopping planning, shopping action, act of buying, children's influence.*

1. Introduction

Younger children begin to act as active consumers at the age of 4 though they get products intended for them with the help of their parents. From six years and on, the child recognizes the value of money and everything that he/she buys. When children reach the age of eight, they are able to understand whether the product bought and the money paid are equal in terms of value. When they reach the age of twelve, they are able to go shopping by comparing products. Therefore, children aged 7-12 do shopping on their own more frequently. Moreover, they spend their own allowances for the product that they choose, and their demands also affect what their parents buy (Berey & Pollay, 1968: p. 70; McNeal, 1979: p. 350; Wimalasari, 2004: p. 274; Malbelegi, 2011: pp. 58, 59).

One of the most important reasons for the increase in the influence of children on the purchasing decisions in the family is the increase in the amount of money that parents can allocate for their children, since the number of children in families has recently decreased. In today's modern nuclear families, communication within the family has become more open and democratic when compared with that of previous generations. In this democratization process, parents' having higher income and educational levels have a significant place. Therefore, children have more personal strength and money. Their ideas and participation in the decision-making process are encouraged and taken seriously by their parents. Another reason for this is that both parents are out during the day, since the number of working women has increased. In divorced families, the situation of single-parent children is the same. Since parents do not have enough time, the child assumes more shopping responsibility for both himself and the needs of the family. The third reason is that children are able to utilize technology and media in accessing

information. Their being exposed to mass communication tools enables them to get information about the products and services on the market and to convince their parents in this issue (Foxman, Tansuhaj&Ekstrom, 1989: p. 482; Caruana&Vassallo, 2003: p. 55; Sutherland & Thompson, 2003: pp. 24-26; Sönmez, 2006: p. 53; Farrell & Shields, 2007: p. 445; Norgaard et al., 2007: pp. 197-198; Badur, 2007: p. 20).

As a matter of fact, in the studies carried out, it was found that children influence the shopping behaviour of their parents at different levels for different products. For example, in a study carried out in the United States of America in 1997, it was found that children directly affect their parents' annual expenditure on food and drinks which is worth more than 110 billion dollars and other expenditures of approximately 188 billion dollars (McNeal, 2007: p. 29). In the study by Caurana and Vasallo (2003), 84.0 % of the parents surveyed noted that their children made decisions in buying food; 29.0 % of them reported that their children made decisions in choosing furniture and 20.0 % of them said that their children made decisions regarding the clothes they buy. This finding indicates that children are more active in food selection which has a central role in family life. Families, who used to do small-scale shopping in the local shop based on a list, have begun to do collective shopping after the emergence of large shopping centres. This in turn has led to the situation in which families stay longer in shopping centres with their children, and the children have gained a position to function as decision-makers (Altunbaş, 2007: p. 672). In this way, the child learns to make a preference between various products before he/she learns to read and write. Most of the products in the shopping cart of the child are bought by the parents (Uğur, 2007: p. 168; Kırdar, 2007: p. 611; Sezgin, 2008: p. 16). For example, Rust (1993) observed parents and children shopping together. In this study, in the shopping cart or while walking beside parents, 27 % of younger children and 9.0 % of elder children pointed at the product they wanted to buy. Moreover, 27.0 % of younger children and 11.0 % of elder children sometimes exhibited the behaviour of getting wrapped up products and placing them into the shopping cart.

Especially for those children who walk along the corridors surrounded by shelves or who travel in the shopping cart, it is both entertaining and informative to watch food products presented in colourful packages since these children are prospective consumers. This was also seen in the study by Rust (1993). In this study, it was observed that there was teamwork between parents and pre-adolescents, that included task allocation, and dialogues signalling the existence

of a shopping plan that had been made before. It was also seen that children were holding a shopping list, or they used a coupon that they had collected in previous shopping instances.

In fact, children's influence can be seen in every step of the process of buying foodstuffs for the family. When families decide to do shopping for food, children participate in this process. Children often help by expressing what type of food they like. Their role in the decision making is generally limited to that extent (Norgaard et al., 2007: pp. 205-206). However the influence of children on purchasing decisions of products and services that they directly consume at home vary according to the decision-making phase. While a child may enjoy the initial decision-making and comparing products but the final decision making might not be so enjoyable. His/her influence on the final decisions might decrease or increase according to shopping site, time and the amount of money to be spent (Belch et al., 1985: p. 164). For instance, in the observational study carried out by Atkin (1978) on parent-child interaction during the time spent for shopping for cereals at the supermarket, in 2 out of 3 instances, it was the child who started the chain of communication by wording his/her desire to buy cereals. 46.0 % of the children indicated what cereals they wanted and 20.0 % of them insisted on their "request". The findings also indicated that the younger children likely to start interacting with their parent in this case than older ones.

In short, children's taking part in shopping activities at earlier ages and their acquiring purchasing experiences is a significant phase in their socializing as consumers. Thus, the child is informed about the products and services on the market and learns to choose the most desirable items in terms of cost and quality. Therefore, our study examined the effect of children aged 7-15 on purchasing decisions to buy foodstuffs for which children interact most frequently with their parents. It aims to provide insight into children's participation levels, especially in the three phases of the food purchasing process; that is, "planning the shopping," "shopping action" and "act of buying".

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Implementation of the Study and Sampling

This study was carried out on 258 parents in the county of Akşehir in Konya city (in Turkey) in the 2010-2011 academic year. In order to select the sample group, five primary schools were randomly chosen among the ones in the town. The sample population of the study consisted of the parents of randomly chosen students of all grades except for the first and second.

154 mothers and 104 fathers, who volunteered to take part in the study, were included. The parents taking part in the study formed three age categories; that is, those at the age of 35 or younger (34.1 %), those at the age of 36-40 (34.5 %), and those at the age of 41 or over (31.4 %). The number of mothers at the age of 35 or younger (% 39.0) were higher than the number of those at the age of 41 or older (% 26.0), while the number of fathers at the age of 35 or younger (% 26.9) were lower than the number of those at the age of 41 or older (% 39.4). More than half of the mothers that formed the sample (63.3 %) were primary school graduates, while 33.6 % of the fathers were high school graduates, and 27.9 % of them were university graduates. 82.5 % of the mothers do not have paid employment, whereas 97.1 % of the fathers had a paid employment.

When the demographical characteristics of the families are examined, it is seen that 42.6 % of the families are comprised of 4 members; 26.4 % of them have 5 members; 18.2 % of them have 6 or more people, and 12.8 % have 3 members. In terms of income, the families were examined in four groups: The families with an income of 600 Turkish liras or less (24.8 %), those with an income of 601-900 Turkish liras (21.3 %), the families with an income of 901-1500 Turkish liras (27.1 %) and those with an income of 1500 Turkish liras and more (26.7 %). 72.5 % of the families have children aged 7-11, while 58.9 % of them do not have children aged 12-15. In addition, 86.8 % of the mothers and 13.2 % of the fathers in the study reported that they went shopping with their children.

2.2. Data Collection Tools

Survey methodology was used in this study. To provide insight into the influence of the children on purchasing decisions of food products in the families, a survey form was prepared by using related resources and previous studies (Sönmez, 2006; Aygün, 2006; Çakır, 2006; Ersoy et al., 2007; Finch et al., 2007; Norgaard et al., 2007; Türkmenoğlu, 2007; Sezgin, 2008). In the survey, items with a five-point Likert scale from "Never" to "Always" were developed to determine the level of children's participation in the process of decision-making for food purchasing, and the parents were requested to respond to these items.

2.3. Validity and Reliability of Data Collection Tool

Statistical analysis was conducted to test the reliability of children's participation in family food purchasing statements. Alpha coefficient for the scale of behaviours as a result of the

analysis reliability (12 items) was calculated as= 0.855. This value indicates the attitude scale is very reliable.

Tablo 1. Factor Analysis Results on the Children's Participation in Family Food Purchasing Process (n= 258)

Name of factor	Behaviour expression	Factor weights	Explanatory the factor (%)	Reliability
<i>Participation in shopping planning</i>	1. Noticing the need to buy a product.	0.701		0.721
	2. Deciding how often to buy an item.	0.748	8.935	
	3. Deciding on the buying time.	0.782		
<i>Participation in shopping action</i>	4. Children's choosing of what they want to buy.	0.656		0.756
	5. Children's helping to write a shopping list.	0.399		
	6. Choosing the supermarket for shopping.	0.668	12.073	
	7. Physical participation in the shopping	0.807		
	8. Searching and locating the food on the shelves.	0.590		
	9. Comparing the prices on the food products.	0.682		
	10. Helping to carry the products to the cashier (To push the cart or carry the shopping bag).	0.629	39.182	
	11. Packaging the food products.	0.726		
12. Helping to carry the filled shopping bag home.	0.815			
		Toplam	60.190	
		Kaiser Meyer Olkin Ölçek Geçerliliği	0.863	
		Bartlett Küresellik Testi	Khi kare	1.031E3
		sd	66	
		p değeri	0.0001	

KMO=0.863, χ^2 Bartlett test (66) =1.0310003, p= 0.0001

Factor analysis was conducted to determine the most relevant behaviours (12) reflecting children's participation in family food purchasing to determine the efficacy of those choices. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was applied in order to test the suitability of data set factor analysis.

Scale value of the behaviours (KMO) is more than 0.70 and Bartlett's test was 0.05 and this level was significant (KMO= 0.863; χ^2 Bartlett test (66) =1.031; p= 0.0001) (Tablo 1).

The behaviour materials have been analyzed by using the method of principal components analysis and Varimax Perpendicular Rotation. The scale of sampling adequacy of the behavior separated three factors. After that we didn't need to repeat the analysis, because there weren't any items in the factors: below 0.50; the only remaining under factor, which factor weighs close to each other and the weight factor below 0.30. The end of the analysis, we found that three behavior factors had eigenvalues of 1 and more: "Participation in shopping planning" "Participation in shopping action" and "Participation in act of buying". The total explained variance was 60.190 %. (Table 1). After the internal consistency of the factor analysis, three factors obtained Cronbach's Alpha values were used in the calculation (These values, respectively, 0.721, 0.756 and 0.767) (Table 1).

2.4. Data Analysis

Using "Pearson Correlation Coefficient" analysis, this study was conducted to determine if there was a relationship between children's effect levels to the purchase decision about food products in the family and parents' demographic variables associated with them. ^

3. Findings

In this section, from the point of view of the parents, is the level of their children's taking part in the purchasing process and whether the participation in question vary according to independent variables were examined.

3.1. The Level of Children's Participation in the Process of Purchasing Food Compared to Parents

According to the responses of the parents included in the study, it was found that half of the children took part in the act of buying (50.4 %), and more than half of them (56.6 %) participated in the "shopping action". However, only 33.4 % of them joined the "planning the shopping" phase (Table 2).

Tablo 2. Average Points of the Children's Participation in Family Food Purchasing Process (n=258)

The Number	Minimum	Maximum	\bar{X}	S_x	Sum	$\bar{X}=3.40$

Name Of Factor	Of Items	andover						
		f	%					
Participation in shoppingplanning	3	1.00	5.00	3.03	1.03	782.00	86	33.33
Participation in shoppingaction	5	1.00	5.00	3.43	0.97	883.60	146	56.59
Participation in act of buying	4	1.00	5.00	3.37	1.08	869.00	130	50.39

Based on this, it can be concluded that while children have more to say in the planning of food for breakfast, they might not be interested in intermediate supplies used for cooking (olive oil, tomato paste, salt, etc.). Therefore, it is natural that they don't have a say in the phase of "planning the shopping" for food as much as their mothers do. However, with the help of the directions given by their parents (such as a list of products and brands to be bought) the children aged 7-15 can perform the shopping and purchasing activity in the supermarket with their parents or on their own.

3.2. The Relationship between the Level of Children's Participation in Food Purchasing and the Independent Variable

Table 3 shows the relationship between the phases of children's participation in purchasing decisions for food shopping and demographical characteristics of parents and families.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Coefficients of the Children's Participation in Family Food Purchasing Process by Independent Variables (n= 258)

Purchase Phases	Independent Variables						
	Gender of parents	Mother's age	Father's age	Mother's education	Father's education	Family size	Income of family (TL)
Participation in shoppingplanning	-0.063	0.040	-0.079	0.144*	-0.088	-0.047	0.114
Participation in shoppingaction	-0.070	0.038	-0.074	0.186**	-0.045	-0.155*	0.250***
Participation in act of buying	-0.149*	0.107	-0.105	0.125*	-0.171**	0.104	0.002

*p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

According to Table 3, there is no correlation between the parents' gender and children's participation in "planning of shopping" and "shopping action" (p>0.05). However, during "the

act of buying" phase, the mothers reported that their children take part in the decision-making more than the fathers did ($r = -0.149$; $p < 0.05$). This is probably because the rate of the mothers going shopping for food with their children (86.8 %) is higher than that of the fathers doing it (13.2 %).

When the children's participation in food shopping activity is examined in terms of the parents' age, there were no statistically significant correlations between age groups of both the mothers ($p > 0.05$) and fathers ($p > 0.05$) for all three phases of shopping (Table 3).

When the shopping behaviour of the children is examined according to the educational level of the parents, it is seen that as the educational level of the mothers increases, they more frequently allow the children to take part in shopping in all three phases; that is, "planning the shopping" ($r = 0.144$; $p < 0.05$), "shopping action" ($r = 0.186$; $p < 0.01$), and "act of buying" ($r = 0.125$; $p < 0.05$). There were no statistically significant correlations between fathers' educational background and children's taking part in shopping in "planning of the shopping" and "shopping action" phases ($p > 0.05$). However, as the educational level of the fathers increased, they gave more responsibilities to their children during the phase "act of buying," ($r = -0.171$; $p < 0.01$) (Table 3). The reason for this might be that as the educational level of the father decreases, he might give more responsibilities to his children due to not having enough time for food shopping and having heavier working conditions.

Based on the number of people in the families, no statistically significant differences were found for children's participation in "planning the shopping" and "act of buying" ($p > 0.05$). However, it was discovered that the parents in the families with three and four members allowed their children to take part in "shopping action" phase more frequently than the parents of more crowded families did. ($r = -0.155$; $p < 0.05$). Perhaps, because going shopping with the child puts the parents off and causes them to waste time, in crowded families with lots of responsibilities, the rate of going shopping with the children or involving them in the shopping activity decreases.

When the relationship between the children's behaviour in food shopping and monthly income of the family is examined, in terms of income groups no statistically significant differences in the phases "planning the shopping" ($p > 0.05$) and "act of buying" ($p > 0.05$) were found. However, the parents with an income of more than 900 Turkish liras, when compared with those with an income under this amount, reported that their children were more actively involved in "the shopping action" phase ($p < 0.001$). In other words, as the level of income

increases, the participation of the children in the purchasing activities increases, too. This might be because there are working mothers among high-income parents, and it might result from these parents' going shopping with their children because of time limitations and their giving the children more shopping responsibilities.

4. Results and Discussions

According to the findings based on the parents responses, the children aged 7-15 participated in "shopping action" and "act of buying" more than they did in the "planning the shopping" phase in their family. In a study on the participation levels of children in food purchasing decisions of the family, Norgaard et al., (2007) found that children actively participated in the purchasing process and they assumed active responsibility in purchasing things with their families. However, they found that parents made more decisions than their children did. This finding accords with the findings of the present study. In a study in which parents and children were observed together, Rust (1993) found that 12.0 % of elder children planned the shopping with their parents, and based on the previous communication they chose the product directly. Rust (1993) also discovered that these children sometimes made a list and did the shopping based on this list. In Rust's study, unlike the present study, the reason for the children's low-level participation in shopping might be due to comparing children at various ages.

In another study, Beatty and Talpade (1994) researched the influence of children on decisions in the family when buying durable consumer goods such as television sets and furniture. They found that the children were more influential in the starting of the purchasing process than in research/decision phase. In another study carried out by Shoham and Dalakas (2003) with the same purpose, the decision process was examined as three phases (1- Starting the purchasing process, 2- Research/evaluation, and 3-The ultimate decision. In this study, it was discovered that children were the most active during the initial phase when the purchasing activity begins, and they were the least active during the phase of research and evaluation. In a study by Aygün (2006) on the influence of children on shopping decisions of families, it was found that children are mostly influential in unearthing the need for the product and determining the brand, colour and model of the product during the process of purchasing the product. At the same time, it was discovered that the child has the smallest influence on how much will be spent on the product and where the product will be bought during decision-making process in the

family. In Çakır's (2006) study on the level of children's influence on the family's purchasing decisions, the researcher found that while the children were slightly influential in determining the amount of food to be bought, they were moderately influential on the other phases of the decision-making process. The phases in which the influence of the children was the highest were "evaluation after shopping," "feeling the need for shopping" and "identifying the brands that determine the need," respectively. Therefore, unlike the findings of the present study, in these four studies the influence of the children centred on the initial phase of the purchasing process. In other words, the children were more dominant since they initiate and influence. It was found that as the process went on, the children had less influence in the decision-making and buying roles when purchasing activity was performed. Why the findings of the studies except for those of the study by Norgaard et al., (2007) differed from the findings of the current one might be due to the fact that each research study focused on different product groups or that the participants responded to questions by thinking about different product groups.

In the present study, there were no statistically significant correlations between the participation behaviour of the child in the purchasing of food and the age of the parents for all three phases of shopping. It can be said that that this particular result is unique to the current study. This is because unlike the present study, in the study by Ersoy et al., it was found that as parents got older, they more frequently asked their children for help during shopping. In this way, they allowed them to take part in shopping directly. In Aygün's (2006) study, it was found that as the age of parents increased, the influence of children generally increased, too. This situation can be explained by both the change in parents' understanding and habits of shopping and the children's getting older as their parents do so, and the increase in their influence on decisions.

The reason for the influence of the children on shopping decisions increases as they get older might result from changing power relations, or it might be due to their being better at what their parents can accept and when they can do that. In addition, this might be related with raising awareness of the children as consumers, their gaining experience in consumption and gradually increasing their knowledge on such issues as products, firms, brands and costs (Rust, 1993: p. 68; Ward & Wackman, 1972: p. 319). Ward and Wackman (1972) studied the efforts of children to influence their mothers' shopping decisions and the mothers' complying with their demands. They found that the demands of elder children were more readily accepted. In Atkin's (1978)

research, in which parents and children were observed at the supermarket together, it was observed that when buying cereals in the supermarket, parents tended to accept what the child wanted as the age of the child increased.

In the present study, there is a negative correlation between the fathers' educational background and "purchasing action" phase. However, it has been found that there is a correlation between all three phases of shopping and the educational background of the mothers. In other words, as the educational level of the mothers increased, they more often allowed their children to be involved in shopping. In the study by Ersoy et al., (2007) on the effect of parents on children's consumer behaviours, it was discovered that the mothers who were high school graduates made more shopping plans and they exhibited more instructive attitudes than those with a primary school diploma.

Moreover, in comparison with the fathers, the mothers more frequently allowed their children to be involved in the "purchasing action." They report that as the number of people in a family decreases and the family's income increases, the parents more frequently allow their children to participate in shopping activities. As noted earlier, this is the result of the democratization process in the nuclear families with higher income.

Briefly, children's taking part in the purchasing process under the guidance of their parents and their acquiring shopping experiences are crucial in terms of the development of consumer awareness. Thus, the child will learn how to prepare a shopping list, to find the most appropriate shop, to choose among a number of alternatives, to determine the time of shopping and to make a comparison between products.

4.1. Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Further Studies

The sampling of the study was selected among the families living in one of the counties (Akşehir) of a province (Konya). It is likely that similar studies to be carried out in various cities in Turkey will provide different results. In prospective studies sampling can include a wider geography to determine the level of children's participation in purchasing decisions in Turkish families in various places.

Another limitation of the study is that the influence of the children on shopping decisions of the family was evaluated by only one of the parents in each family. This might have resulted in some misleading differences in some product types and some activity and decision areas of the purchasing process. In prospective studies, the influence of children on shopping decisions of the

family will be evaluated in connection with the responses to be collected from parents and children.

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