

Barriers and Vulnerability Sources in Shopping Mall Services: The Perspective of People with Disabilities



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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the sources of vulnerabilities that people with disabilities experience in shopping malls and their access to those environments. Findings are presented from 20 semi-structured interviews with participants who have visual and orthopedic impairments. Findings point out the physical, social and emotional barriers, and the resulting vulnerabilities which are inherent, situational and pathogenic vulnerability faced by people with disabilities in an emerging market. The vulnerability source is associated with the corresponding vulnerability type. For example; road related physical vulnerability source is considered as inherent and situational vulnerability, and human related emotional vulnerability source, as inherent and pathogenic vulnerability. This study aims to contribute to the existing body of literature, pro-

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viding a broader perspective that encompasses shopping mall access and inside mobility, and also contributes to the vulnerability literature, pointing to enhance awareness level of the sources of vulnerability in the selected content.

Keywords: Vulnerability, shopping mall, people with disabilities, emerging country

Alışveriş Merkezleri Hizmetlerinde Engeller ve Savunmasızlık Kaynakları: Engelli Bireylerin Bakış Açısı

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, engelli bireylerin alışveriş merkezlerine erişimde ve alışveriş merkezinin içerisinde tecrübe ettikleri savunmasızlık kaynaklarını araştırmaktır. Görme ve ortopedik engelleri olan katılımcılarla yapılan 20 yarı yapılandırılmış mülakattan elde edilen bulgular sunulmaktadır. Bulgular, gelişmekte olan bir pazarda engelli bireylerin karşılaştığı fiziksel engellere, sosyal ve duygusal engellere ve bunların sonucunda ortaya çıkan doğal, durumsal ve patojenik savunmasızlıklara işaret etmektedir. Savunmasızlık kaynağı, karşılık gelen savunmasızlık türüyle ilişkilendirilmektedir. Örneğin; yolla ilgili fiziksel savunmasızlık kaynağı, doğal ve durumsal savunmasızlık türü altında değerlendirilirken, insan kaynaklı duygusal savunmasızlık kaynağı, kalıtsal ve patojenik savunmasızlık altında incelenmektedir. Bu çalışma, alışveriş merkezi erişimi ve içerisindeki hareket yetkinliğini kapsayarak, geniş bir perspektif sunarak mevcut literatüre katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bunun yanı sıra, savunmasızlık literatürüne de katkı sağlamak ve seçilen içerikteki savunmasızlık kaynaklarına yönelik daha yüksek bir farkındalık düzeyi oluşturmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Savunmasızlık, alışveriş merkezi, engelli bireyler, gelişmekte olan ülke

Introduction

Oliver (1996, p.31) defined disability as “the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal

level with others due to physical and social barriers”. Approximately 10% of the world’s population experience some form of disability, and unfortunately, prevalence is higher for emerging countries (World Health Organization, 2011). People with disabilities are vulnerable consumers by nature, and thus creating value for vulnerable consumers with impairments through services is crucial due to their stigmatized living in their daily social lives. Apart from the barriers they face in fulfilling their primary needs, there is also a necessity for enhancing consumer experiences in retail settings, as they are the ones underserved, ignored, and excluded from marketplaces (Morris, 2001). In a society where consumption is considered valuable, individuals are excluded if they do not have access to products, brands, and consumption activities (Beudaert et al., 2017). People with disabilities are mostly unrecognized as a market segment (Dubost, 2018). Even when recognized, it requires more effort to understand this special market segment and thus, generating accessible service offerings is more challenging (Dubost, 2018).

People with disabilities (at least with one type of disability) is 6.9% in general population in Türkiye (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Aile, Çalışma ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı, 2022), and this high percentage requires more attention from academics and practitioners. There is a need for research that is more focused on understanding vulnerable consumers’ demands in shopping environments, especially in emerging countries. In such countries, lack of knowledge and education can create neglect and exclusion for people with disabilities (Hammel et al., 2015; Dahan-Oliel et al., 2016; Speicher et al., 2017).

Customer vulnerability in marketing refers to a consumer’s susceptibility to a reduction in consumption (Özgen, 2016). The factors impacting vulnerable consumers should be revealed to develop solutions that enhance collaboration between consumers and service providers (Corus and Saatcioglu, 2015). According to a study conducted in Turkey, there is limited understanding on vulnerable customers’ needs and wants, as well as their goals and aspirations, and it is necessary to conduct research to educate them about products and consumption habits in the

city (Sandıkçı et al., 2014). Vulnerable consumers do not have equality of opportunities to consume certain products and services (Baktır, 2021). However, only a limited number of studies focus on improving the retail environment for the welfare of vulnerable consumers (Edward et al., 2018). In this context, the emerging notion of transformative service research (TSR) is grounded on the contribution of services in linking individual and societal transformation (Blocker and Barrios, 2015). TSR aims to comprehend how service organizations are able to create greater value, particularly for vulnerable consumers (Rosenbaum et al., 2017). By adopting a transformative approach, this study aims to focus on barriers and vulnerabilities faced by people with disabilities. Findings from this study will potentially contribute to the promotion and design of fair retail and shopping mall services for people with disabilities. To enhance the transformative nature of retail services and shopping environments, we employ a broader perspective, embracing shopping mall mobility and the needs of people with disabilities. The mobility of consumers is dominantly planned and provided for people without disabilities (Yau et al., 2004), therefore, we examine the shopping experience of people with disabilities to improve their opportunities for access and mobility in shopping malls. It is important to remember that the customer journey begins with the planning of a shopping trip and involves transportation to shopping malls, and indoor movements, including in-store mobility (Crosier and Handford, 2012).

It is evident that service researchers need to further investigate service design and processes' impact on vulnerable consumers (Rosenbaum et al., 2017). Given these issues, this paper aims to answer two research questions:

- What types of barriers do people with disabilities experience in shopping mall services?

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First, we provide a review of transformative service research and vulnerability and consumers. Then we present our methodology and findings. Finally, we conclude with discussion and suggestions for further research.

Transformative Services in Shopping Mall Context

TSR is defined as “service research that centers on creating uplifting changes and improvements in the well-being of consumer entities: individuals (consumers and employees), communities, and the ecosystem” (Anderson et al., 2013, p.1204). TSR looks for the links between service and well-being (Anderson and Ostrom, 2015), encompassing different aspects such as financial well-being (e.g. Martin and Hill, 2015); healthcare (e.g. Sweeney et al. 2015; Anderson et al., 2018), dark tourism (e.g. Magee and Gilmore, 2015), social inclusion (Yao et al., 2015) and poverty (e.g. Blocker et al., 2013; Blocker and Barrios, 2015). TSR has a significant value for improving conditions for vulnerable segments such as minorities, the homeless population, and people with disabilities (Abney et al., 2017).

Transformative retail services have the following attributes (Troebbs et al., 2018): (1) conveying intangible benefits for enhancing the psychological and physical well-being of consumers, (2) not requiring the actual purchase or use of retailer products or services, providing the availability to all consumers, not only actual customers, (3) conveying a meaningful aim (e.g. to increase the life-quality, well-being, or inclusion level of consumers), in contrast to regular retail services, which generally aim to increase convenience and hedonic consumption.

With transformative retail services, incremental benefits can be generated beyond the psychological and physical well-being of vulnerable people. Stakeholders such as shopping malls and retailers can benefit from commercial gains from the inclusion of neglected, and consequently, excluded consumer segments, and the resulting increase in customer loyalty (Rosenbaum et al., 2011).

Transformative retail services can be used inside or outside retail facilities, and should also be embedded into online retail services. Food retailers serving online healthy meal preparation classes can be given as an example. Herein, we posit transformative retail services as the mobility and access enhancing services provided in a shopping mall (in-store/out-store and interior/exterior areas of shopping malls) and consumer logistics environments.

Consumers and Vulnerability

Understandings of vulnerability in marketing have traditionally synonymized the concept with terms such as the “disadvantaged” or “neglected” consumer, focusing on how facets and structures such as low income, gender, race, illness, mobility, and geography lead to the exclusion of some consumers from consumption-related activities relative to others (Davies & Champion, 1980; Westlake, 1993; Piachaud & Webb, 1996; Skyrme and Woods, 2018). Drawing upon Fineman’s arguments on vulnerability include four processors (Fineman, 2010): it is universal and constant; it is not located in the body alone, but may be the product of economic, institutional, and other social harm; it causes disadvantage (including discrimination) that is best addressed by moving past identity categories; and it should be addressed by both state and private actors (Satz, 2008). Each individual in society may experience a universal vulnerability. People with disabilities have other universal vulnerabilities that they may experience more seriously, that are constant and extend across their home, work, and social environments. (Satz, 2008).

Fineman’s focus on vulnerability as universal and constant defines the relationship between the state and the individual. The state’s role is expanded beyond addressing specific dependencies of certain protected groups, and involves responding to the vulnerability of each individual, regardless of financial, social, or physical disabilities (Kirby, 2006 and Rosenbaum, 2017). As stated in Lid’s study (2015), people with disabilities experience exclusion even from the opportunity to enjoy equal citizenship.

The difference between people with and without disabilities emerge as a result of both the embodiment of humans, and also their role as social beings embedded in social institutions and relationships (Fineman, 2017). This notion overlaps with Rogers et al.’s taxonomy (2012), pointing to three types of vulnerabilities: inherent, situational, and pathogenic. Inherent vulnerability is specific to the human condition, and is related to the sources of vulnerability arising from our neediness, our dependence on others, and our emotional and social aspects. Every individual,

whether disabled or not, is emotionally and socially connected to others, and therefore, every source of vulnerability discussed in our research falls under this type of vulnerability. In our study, we focus on the visually and orthopedically impaired facing inherent vulnerability due to their disabilities and related dependence. The severity of their vulnerabilities varies depending on the degree of the barriers they confront. Situational vulnerability may arise from the personal, social, political, economic or environmental conditions of individuals or social groups. As with internal vulnerability, its severity can vary. Inherent and situational vulnerability are not categorically different, but the result of genetic, social and environmental influences depending on the resistance of individuals can be different (Bullock and Thomas, 2007; Prinsloo and Slade (2016). We focus on the situational vulnerabilities that those consumers experience due to environmental, social, political, or other related factors, such as the inadequate equipment/design of shopping malls (e.g. parking spaces) or the lack of required facilities in public transportation.

Pathogenic vulnerability is defined as a sociopolitical situation characterized by disrespect, prejudice, or abuse, morally characterized by oppression, injustice, cruelty, or political violence (Rogers et al., 2012). A key feature of pathogenic vulnerability is considered to be its role in undermining agency and exacerbating the feeling of powerlessness. For example, people with cognitive disabilities who are sometimes vulnerable due to their care needs may be subject to sexual abuse by caregivers (Rogers et al., 2012). This is classified as pathogenic vulnerability. Furthermore, people with disabilities experience various negative emotions, such as helplessness, shame, anger, and insecurity, as they encounter many barriers in their access to shopping mall services, which is considered as a form of pathogenic vulnerability.

Disability Studies in Retailing

Disability is the result of the interaction between a person and his or her social and physical environment, and requires the redistribution of resources, or the flow of resources in society by changing the social or

physical environment (Silvers et al., 1998). Retail design, human-centered activities in the retail environments and the physical and non-physical elements of those activities include value propositions through restructured provider offerings, service environment, and service delivery (Blocker & Barrios, 2015). There is a considerable amount of research on various service settings for people with disabilities, such as in airplanes (Poria et al., 2010) and restaurants (Abney et al., 2017). Calle et al. (2022) examined transport drivers' opinions since they provide the service and interact with people with disabilities. In shopping malls, people with disabilities experience physical barriers both in the internal (e.g. main entrance, doors, stairs, elevators, toilets) and external environment (e.g. parking areas, bus/taxi stops, curb cuts) (Bashiti and Rahim, 2016). The problems hindering the mobility of people with disabilities are revealed as overall store access, availability of accommodative equipment, mobility in-store settings, display accessibility, merchandise trialability, barriers in common service amenities, and store personnel interaction (Kaufman-Scarborough, 1999). In another study, Kaufman-Scarborough (2001) classified the experience of mobility-disabled consumers in the retail servicescape as logistical barriers, psychological reactions to the environment, and interpersonal barriers. More specific studies focusing on certain disability types also exist. Faria et al., (2017) explored the servicescape experiences and most valued service attributes for visually impaired people, and Beudaert et al. (2017) employed a similar approach for hidden auditory disorders.

The rights of people with disabilities are violated in transportation, health and employment, and as a result, the consumer rights of people with disabilities are also violated (Özbakır Umut et al., 2021). When the people with disabilities are not in the daily social life for any reason, this creates vulnerability (Tatar et al., 2019). Shopping malls are among the important retail servicescapes in daily life consumption, and there is a need for more studies to examine the satisfaction and perception of people with disabilities regarding accessibility in these buildings (Bashiti and Rahim, 2016). The marketing studies on people with disabilities in Turkey is very limited (e.g. Canbulut and Atik, 2016; Kenzhebayeva

and Boylu, 2018; Özbakır Umut et al., 2021). In this regard, herein, we investigate and discuss the barriers as vulnerability sources and transformative actions required in response to the needs of people with disabilities in shopping environments and their access to those environments.

Methodology

Data Collection

We employed semi-structured interview technique as one of the most appropriate methods for gaining a deeper knowledge of the participants' experiences and thoughts (Bernard and Ryan, 2016). Interview themes include the reasons for choosing shopping malls, the purpose of visiting these, and the associated access and mobility issues. By following the snowball sampling technique, we utilized disability-oriented nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and social institutions to reach both visually and orthopedically impaired people. Three organizations were selected to access volunteer respondents: City Public Library, Association with People with Disabilities, and Aegean Disabled Environment and Culture Cooperative (EGETEKO). These NGOs are organizations in which volunteer educators provide training for people with disabilities. The involved NGOs contacted the members, and a list of volunteers was drawn up. Consent forms were used to obtain permissions, and one researcher performed all interviews. The interviewer explained the rationale behind the study. The recorded interviews lasted 30 to 90 minutes, and for the convenience of our informants were conducted at the NGOs' premises with their permission. Transcripts were written and each researcher read and commented on these independently.

Through independent coding by three researchers, and triangulation across researchers contributed to the reliability and validity of the study. Following independent interpretation, researchers jointly discussed, uncovered and justified themes from the analysis to ensure the internal validity of the research. In addition, to ensure the external validity of the research, the sample was diversified to allow generalization, by considering different types of disabled individuals. We employed a pilot study

for testing the appropriateness of questions to reinforce the construct validity of the research. Based on the feedback, we redesigned some questions to ensure their comprehensibility and relevance to the purpose of the research. Moreover, we set up a meeting with a prominent shopping mall's management team to confirm the validity of the issues and the eligibility of proposed ideas.

Ranging in age from 19 to 76, our informants were comprised of students, unemployed, employed and retired people (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics and type of disabilities of the informants

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Occupation	Marital Status	Type of Disability
Informant1	Male	59	Engineer (Retired)	Married	Visual
Informant2	Male	26	Student	Single	Visual
Informant3	Male	57	Coiffeur (Retired)	Married	Orthopedic
Informant4	Female	76	Housewife (Retired)	Single	Orthopedic
Informant5	Female	63	Officer (Retired)	Single	Orthopedic
Informant6	Male	53	Musician	Married	Visual
Informant7	Male	56	Journalist (Retired)	Single	Orthopedic
Informant8	Female	37	Student	Single	Orthopedic
Informant9	Male	64	Repairman	Married	Orthopedic
Informant10	Male	50	Machinist (Retired)	Single	Orthopedic
Informant11	Male	30	Production Manager (Retired)	Single	Orthopedic
Informant12	Female	47	Unemployed	Single	Orthopedic
Informant13	Female	60	Unemployed	Single	Orthopedic
Informant14	Female	52	Officer (Retired)	Married	Orthopedic
Informant15	Female	56	Unemployed	Single	Orthopedic
Informant16	Female	45	Unemployed	Single	Orthopedic
Informant17	Male	45	Unemployed	Married	Orthopedic
Informant18	Male	24	Student	Single	Visual
Informant19	Female	19	Student	Single	Visual
Informant20	Female	40	Student	Married	Visual

Data Analysis

Three researchers coded the data via open-axial and selective coding methodology suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998) (see Table 2 and Table 3). The study was designed as a grounded theory approach, and data was collected in accordance with the requirements of this method, i.e., data collection and analysis are performed simultaneously.

Data saturation was reached when informants produced no new information. 20 interviews were conducted; involving 6 participants with visual impairments and 14 participants with orthopedic impairments (see Table 1). Although only 6 visually impaired participants were involved, we reached data saturation.

Two approaches were followed when analyzing the data: continuous comparison of data and applying encoding stages respectively. These activities were carried out simultaneously. Data was continuously compared with other data, and as a result, categories were formed from raw data. In such a coding method, the experiences and opinions of different participants were compared. Therefore, herein, data in different categories were compared to discover the inherent theoretical elements.

In open coding, interviews recorded were decoded into the text, line by line. Then this data was divided into chunks, compared, and categorized. With the continuous comparison of data, similarities and differences were revealed, and conceptual labels were given to them. Data was labeled without limitation in this way, an example of a label was “inability to detect floor numbers in elevators”. In the second stage, defined as axial coding or theoretical coding, efforts were made to create links among the categories revealed as a result of open coding. Categories and their mutual relations were integrated to create a storyboard in the final stage of data analysis.

People with disabilities experience vulnerability due to their physical disabilities, regarded as natural or inherent. The sources of vulnerability refer to the source of the main barriers experienced. These make people with physical vulnerabilities dependent on the care and support of others. However, the barriers encountered can be reduced with appropriate sup-

port and service, and their welfare and quality of life can be increased. Accordingly, Table 2 shows the sources of the vulnerability, the barriers encountered by people with disabilities and the type of vulnerability.

Table 2: Examples of coding for barriers

Type of impairment	Quotes	First order code	Second order code (vulnerability sources)	Third Order code (Vulnerability type)
visually impaired	<i>"If I get on the elevator alone, I cannot read the number. As I do not see, I cannot read whether I push to the fourth floor or fifth."</i> (Informant 1, Male, 59)	inability to detect floor numbers in elevator	shopping mall related physical vulnerability source	Inherent and situational vulnerability (insufficient physical facilities) vulnerability
orthopedically impaired	<i>"Parking areas need to be constructed more widely."</i> (Informant 17, Male, 45)	parking area barrier	parking area related physical vulnerability source	Inherent and situational vulnerability (insufficient physical facilities)
visually & orthopedically impaired	<i>"For the food that we buy self-service, we need the help of someone who can see. This is because we do not know the environment."</i> (Informant 6, Male, 53)	food carriage barrier	food court related physical vulnerability source	Inherent and situational vulnerability (lack of extra service for disabled)
visually impaired	<i>"You go to the food court and you look at the menu. You do not have any opportunity to read."</i> (Informant 6, Male, 53)	menu problem	food court related physical vulnerability source	Inherent and situational vulnerability (lack of extra service for disabled)
orthopedically impaired	<i>"The changing rooms are very small. It is really difficult to dress and undress alone for us."</i> (Informant 8, Female, 37)	small changing rooms	store related physical vulnerability source	Inherent and situational vulnerability (insufficient physical facilities)
visually impaired	<i>"If we go to the shopping mall by bus, we cannot see the number of buses."</i> (Informant 20, Female, 40)	inability to read the bus number	vehicle related physical vulnerability source	Inherent and situational vulnerability (lack of equipment in public transport)
visually impaired	<i>"Stairs cause problems for us. There should be a ramp everywhere."</i> (Informant 2, Male, 26)	lack of ramps	road related physical vulnerability source	Inherent and situational vulnerability (insufficient physical facilities)

orthopedical-ly impaired	<i>“Some people are so insensitive. On buses, there are only a few places for us.” (Informant 12, Female, 47)</i>	occupation of disabled bus seats	human related social vulnerability source	Inherent and situational vulnerability (not obeying rules of non-disabled)
visually impaired	<i>“Even if there is a yellow strip, you cannot use them. People occupy pavements.” (Respondent 19, Female, 19)</i>	occupation of pavements	human related social vulnerability source	Inherent and situational vulnerability (not obeying rules of nondisabled citizens)
orthopedical-ly impaired	<i>“Another problem is parking cars on the disabled ramp. People park their cars on the way that disabled go down.” (Respondent 15, Female, 56)</i>	occupation of disabled parking area	human related social vulnerability source	Inherent and situational vulnerability (not obeying rules of nondisabled citizens)
orthopedical-ly impaired	<i>“I go to the shopping malls especially during the weekdays and hours of work since shopping malls are too crowded at the weekends. So many people mean so much disrespect.” (Respondent 17, Male, 45)</i>	being subject to disrespectful behavior	human related emotional vulnerability source	Inherent and pathogenic vulnerability (unethical actions of nondisabled people)
orthopedical-ly impaired	<i>“People with disabilities have infrastructural employment and economic problems. However, they have the problem beyond everything that is ‘social perception’. Unless we change the social perception, this perception will always be there. We are in life. Even if you see us as another separate class, we are human. Firstly, treat us as human.” (Respondent 7, Male, 56)</i>	social inequality	human related emotional vulnerability source	Inherent and pathogenic vulnerability (unethical actions of nondisabled people)
orthopedical-ly impaired	<i>“I cannot go up stairs if there is no escalator. At that moment I felt desperate. You cannot tell anybody. Maybe only to your wife or to your son.” (Respondent 3, Male, 57)</i>	feeling in psychological despair	human related emotional vulnerability source	Inherent and pathogenic vulnerability (unethical actions of nondisabled people)

Findings

People with disabilities experience vulnerability due to their physical disabilities, which we consider to be either natural or congenital. Natural sources of vulnerability are the actual sources of the main barriers experienced and makes people with physical vulnerabilities dependent on the care and support of others. However, if the barriers encountered by the vulnerable consumers are not solved, it is not possible to provide desired services. For example, if the elevator buttons are not equipped with touch or audio devices, the visually impaired cannot use the elevators, causing them both inherent and situational vulnerability. Therefore, there may be a relationship between inherent vulnerability and situational vulnerability, as mentioned in the previous sections.

The data analysis showed that, in the shopping malls, informants face barriers in two main areas: in access and mobility. Remarkably, taking a wider view and examining the entire process in customer experience revealed the types of barriers and sources of vulnerabilities. We revealed the physical, social, and emotional barriers. Additionally, we also discovered the associated negative emotion states, such as desperation and embarrassment.

Barriers in Access to Shopping Malls and Related Vulnerabilities

The consumers consider accessibility in terms of time, distance and effort involved in traveling to the shopping mall (Calvo-Porrall, & Lévy-Mangin, 2019). Since most of these aspects are ignored in the access stage, individuals with visual and orthopedic impairments confront several barriers.

These individuals experience physical vulnerability due to physical disabilities, which we consider to be either natural or congenital. This type overlaps with another type, inherent vulnerability, and it makes people with physical vulnerabilities dependent on the care and support of others.

One of the primary hurdles that emerged from these findings is the physical barriers in transportation, which prohibits access to the shopping malls. Infrastructural inadequacies such as improper roads and ramps are road-related physical barriers for both visual and orthopedic impaired individuals.

The barriers encountered during access stage differ according to age, type and degree of disability. For example, while some orthopedically impaired individuals can board a bus by using the steps, others are completely dependent on a wheelchair and must wait for the driver to approach the stop and open the ramp. Besides, findings revealed that even when a ramp exists, due to design and positioning of the ramps there can still be issues.

Informants point to the barriers and injuries that they experience due to lack of adequate pavements or yellow visibility stripes. Damaged or badly- designed pavements cause problems both for visually and orthopedically impaired people.

As one of the visually-impaired informant's states, reading bus numbers is challenging. Since some audio devices to solve this problem are now available, we consider this issue as a vehicle-related physical barrier. Additionally, there are facility-related barriers, such as the malfunctioning elevators at underground stations.

Human-related issues also arise in the access stage. A regularly reported social barrier is the inappropriate occupation of disabled seats/ areas in local transportation buses. Other problems are blocked ramps, pavements and more specifically, yellow visibility strips, all of which hinder the mobility of visually and orthopedically impaired people.

Barriers in Shopping Malls and Related Vulnerabilities

In addition to the vulnerability sources in the access stages, we also revealed the vulnerability sources inside the shopping malls. Menus or seating designs in food courts may become a source of difficulty for these people. Considering these, special arrangements should be made in food courts and entertainment areas. Prioritization of people with dis-

abilities in public services is legally enforceable. However, in practice, due to social barriers and store employees' lack of initiative, people with disabilities still face many challenges.

The responsible authorities consider people with disabilities when formulating procedures, standards, or design equipment and services, but in practice, people with disabilities may still face issues with social barriers. These can take different forms such as shopping trolleys left in disabled parking areas or the illegal occupancy of disabled parking areas.

For people with disabilities, interaction with staff (e.g. store staff, security, and drivers) at service encounters is also crucial. Education emerges as the only solution for overcoming social barriers, and for increasing awareness related to the disabled in society.

Visually impaired people are exposed to negative social attitudes that arise out of lack of familiarity with how to treat a person with a disability. Especially, service employees interacting with people with disabilities in service encounters require more specialized training in how to act and behave.

Emotional Barriers and Related Vulnerabilities

In line with the study by Kaufman-Scarborough (2001), we revealed intense psychological and emotional feelings experienced by people with disabilities. Emotions that emerged from the interaction with society are important for the people with disabilities. Barriers in their access to shopping malls or inside the malls can result in various negative emotions, such as desperation, embarrassment, annoyance, and distrust. Another strong negative feeling frequently reported is that of social discrimination. They believe that they are being stigmatized and discriminated against, and for some, this issue clearly outweighs all others. Our notion of pathogenic vulnerability is evident in the situations to which people with disabilities are exposed, quoted below.

“People with disabilities have infrastructural employment and economic problems. However, they have a problem beyond everything, that is,

‘social perception’. Unless we change the social perception, this perception will always be there. We are in life. Even if you see us as another separate class, we are human. Firstly, treat us as human.” (Respondent 7, Male, 56)

In some situations, they cannot call for help to overcome the difficulty they face, and thus, feel alone and miserable. At those times, desperation also emerges.

“I cannot go upstairs if there is no escalator. At that moment I feel desperate. You cannot tell anybody. Maybe only to your wife or to your son.” (Respondent 3, Male, 57)

Considering their visual and orthopedic impairments, we understand that they have fears that become prominent, also in shopping. Unfortunately, in some situations, people with disabilities experience problems that may distort their trust in society. This was one of the various issues raised by people with visual impairments who are afraid of financial deception, as they are unable to clearly read the values on banknotes. This implies that they feel insecure even in the transaction stage during shopping. This distrust in society highlights the need for employees’ assistance and awareness.

“If staff can help us, we can do the shopping. Because we cannot see the money, we do not trust people. For example, maybe I will give 200 TL instead of 20 TL” (Respondent 18, Male, 24)

Discussion

Vulnerability is a part of a person’s daily life; it is universal and continuous, specific to the human condition (Fineman 2011). Everyone at different stages during life can become vulnerable for any reason that is often unpredictable. In the context of disability-related vulnerability, businesses are responsible for accessibility for people with disabilities as customers, and consequently, have a responsibility to provide all customers with resources to ensure their equal and successful participation.

In addition to difficulties accessing the goods and services provided, it is necessary to know that the consumer vulnerability of disabled

people is not simply a direct result of their disability, but a result of the synergy between the workforce and the business world (Eskyte, 2019). Shopping malls are public spaces where the social and physical environment are interconnected, and they have a role in social participation (Swaine et al., 2014). The shopping malls introduced into the Turkish market have influenced the consumption rates positively and changed the purchasing behavior of the consumers (Akgün, 2010). Moreover, shopping malls are locations where consumers experience feelings of entertainment. These features lead to significant economic value added transactions and revenue growth for the shopping malls (Yeşilot and Dal, 2019). However, shopping malls should aim to provide more than enhancement in sales. The practices, facilities and all the associated servicescapes should cater to all consumer groups, including the vulnerable consumers. According to a recent study conducted in Turkey, one of the most recently-opened and most popular shopping malls, İstinye Park Izmir, is considered merely as a consumption space, as a shopping mall which does not convey the principles of equality and accessibility (Bal and Akyol Altun, 2022).

The design of shopping malls impacts the perception of visitors with interactions among customers, employees, and environmental factors which comprises a perceived servicescape (Kaufman-Scarborough, 1999). Unfortunately, the mobility-related barriers in a shopping mall are likely to create an overall negative perception regarding the entire retail environment (Kaufman-Scarborough, 1999) by causing physical and social barriers for people with disabilities (Swaine et al., 2014). Through transformative service design, it is possible to comprehend the factors that influence individual and societal well-being, and to promote equitable service for the disabled, while eliminating the barriers (Corus and Saatcioglu, 2015).

It is important to reveal and understand the service and consumption experiences of people with disabilities (Poria et al., 2010). According to the findings obtained in this research, visually and orthopedically impaired people experience many difficulties in parking/circulation areas, in-stores, food courts-cinemas and in transportation.

Physical barriers are created by fundamental design problems in shopping malls, such as the absence of ramps, yellow strips, and disabled toilets. Apart from these, in line with Wakefield and Blodgett (1996), crucial impediments to free mobility of people with disabilities were found to be layout accessibility problems in parking areas, elevators, cinemas and food courts. The oversight point of Fineman's (2010) vulnerability theory argues for equal access to all areas in which people with disabilities participate and spend time. Innate and situational vulnerability can only be reduced by certain moral and political obligations through targeted interventions.

Inherent vulnerabilities are natural and inevitable referring to simple vulnerabilities, such as lack of self-protection, security and comfort. Some of these vulnerabilities can be reduced by social and attitudinal change. Social, cultural and political reaction transformations can reduce the existing and potential vulnerabilities of people with disabilities.

Considering the impacts of interactions with service employees, more tolerant approaches can be adopted through closer communication and interest in people with disabilities' needs, in line with Baker et al. (2007). Furthermore, as Gibson et al. (2009) state, the most positive relationships reported by participants are based on views which emphasize acceptance of each other's humanity, mutual respect, and compassion.

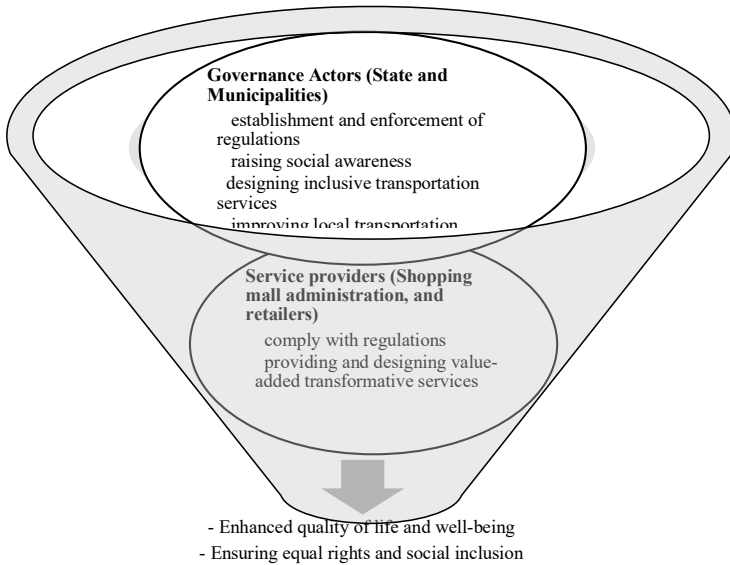


Figure 1: Actors and responsibilities to remove barriers and vulnerabilities

As indicated in Figure 1, the state is responsible for guaranteeing a certain standard of life for people with disabilities, and through fully applying the existing regulations and formulating new ones, their quality of life can be improved. All stakeholders, including the state, municipalities, and service providers have responsibility to ensure the integration of people with disabilities into society. In this context, public authorities should take effective measures to provide equality principle of the Constitution. Municipalities should interfere in conditions that prevent taking advantage of the rights for disabled. The service providers in the shopping malls should apply and pursue standards and regulations enforced by the state and municipality. If all members of society work in coordination, social awareness about people with disabilities will increase and this will contribute to greater social cooperation and well-being.

Municipalities must take effective actions to enforce these regulations by auditing and increasing sanctions for violations. Service providers encompassing several players- shopping mall management, food court restaurant owners, and cinema service providers- should fully im-

plement the regulations, and should seek service design enhancements for barrier-free mobility. Designing servicescapes to serve vulnerable consumers is not only valuable for consumer well-being and social justice, but also beneficial for retail business (Edward et al., 2018). When appropriate accessibility conditions are provided, shopping malls may transform into attractions for people with disabilities, ensuring their participation in social life.

Limitations and Future Research

In terms of limitations, this study was only conducted with people who have visual and orthopedic impairments, excluding other impairment types. Further research is also needed for the barriers experienced by those with other kinds of disabilities in different fields, especially in emerging country contexts. This research provides qualitative results only obtained through semi-structured interviews, therefore lacks the insight which can be derived through focus group studies with the related stakeholders, namely, shopping mall administration, municipality, and citizens. Approaches involving wider participation can be employed for formulating transformative service design offerings.

Research and Publication Ethics Statement

This study was carried out in accordance with principles of research and publication ethics.

Contribution of the Authors

The manuscript was prepared by the authors.

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Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest for this study.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Alışveriş Merkezleri Hizmetlerinde Engeller ve Savunmasızlık Kaynakları: Engelli Bireylerin Bakış Açısı

Pazarlamada tüketici savunmasızlığı, bir tüketicinin tüketimde azalmaya olan duyarlılığını ifade etmektedir (Özgen, 2016). Savunmasız tüketiciler, belirli ürün ve hizmetleri tüketme konusunda fırsat eşitliğine sahip değildir (Baktır, 2021). Yalnızca sınırlı sayıda çalışma, savunmasız tüketicilerin refahı için perakende ortamını iyileştirmeye odaklanmaktadır (Edward ve diğerleri, 2018). Tüketiciler ve hizmet sağlayıcılar arasındaki iş birliğini geliştiren çözümler geliştirmek için savunmasız tüketicileri etkileyen faktörlerin ortaya çıkarılması gerekmektedir (Corus ve Saatcioğlu, 2015). Bunların başında dünya nüfusunun yaklaşık %10'unu kapsayan engelli bireyler gelmektedir (Dünya Sağlık Örgütü, 2011).

Bu çalışmanın amacı, engelli bireylerin alışveriş merkezlerine erişimde ve alışveriş merkezinin içerisinde tecrübe ettikleri savunmasızlık kaynaklarını araştırmaktır. Çalışmada dönüştürücü hizmet araştırması kavramı, hizmetlerin bireysel ve toplumsal dönüşümü birbirine bağlamadaki katkısı ile ilişkilendirilmektedir (Blocker ve Barrios, 2015). Dönüştürücü bir yaklaşım benimseyen bu çalışma, engelli bireylerin karşılaştığı engellere ve savunmasızlıklara odaklanmaktadır.

Çalışmada, görme ve ortopedik engelleri olan 6 görme engelli ve 14 ortopedik engelli katılımcıyla yapılan 20 yarı yapılandırılmış mülakattan elde edilen bulgular sunulmaktadır. Çalışma, gömülü teori yaklaşımı olarak tasarlanmış ve veriler bu yöntemin gerekliliklerine uygun olarak toplanmıştır. Bu nedenle, veri toplama ve analiz eş zamanlı olarak gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Analiz sonuçları, engelli bireylerin alışveriş merkezlerinde iki ana alanda engelle karşılaştığını göstermektedir: alışveriş merkezlerine erişim ve alışveriş merkezlerinde hareketlilik. Alışveriş merkezlerine erişim aşamasında karşılaşılan engeller yaşa, engelin türüne ve derecesine göre farklılık göstermektedir. Örneğin; bazı ortopedik engelli bireyler otobüse merdivenleri kullanarak binebilirken, diğerleri tamamen tekerlekli sandalyeye bağımlıdır ve sürücünün durağa yanaşıp rampayı açmasını beklemek zorundadır. Alışveriş merkezlerinin içerisinde yaşanan engellere örnek olarak ise, engelli olmayan vatandaşların alışveriş arabalarını engelli park yerlerine bırakmaları veya engelli park yerlerinin kaçak olarak kullanılması verilebilir.

Müşteri deneyimindeki tüm sürecin incelenmesi, engel türlerini ve savunmasızlıkların kaynaklarını ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu engeller; fiziksel, sosyal ve duygusal engellerdir. Çalışmada elde edilen fiziksel, sosyal ve duygusal engellerin sonucunda ortaya çıkan doğal, durumsal ve patojenik savunmasızlıklara da işaret edilmektedir. Elde edilen savunmasızlık kaynakları, karşılık gelen savunmasızlık türüyle ilişkilendirilmektedir. Örneğin; yolların yetersizliği ile ilgili fiziksel savunmasızlık kaynağı, doğal ve durumsal savunmasızlık türü altında değerlendirilirken, insan kaynaklı duygusal savunmasızlık kaynağı, kalıtsal ve patojenik savunmasızlık altında incelenmektedir. Buna ek olarak çalışmada, engelli bireylerin yaşadığı umutsuzluk ve utanç gibi olumsuz duygu durumları tespit edilmiştir.

Bu çalışma, alışveriş merkezlerine erişim ve alışveriş merkezleri içerisindeki hareket yetkinliğini kapsayarak, geniş bir perspektifte mevcut literatüre katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bunun yanı sıra, savunmasızlık literatürüne de katkı sağlamakta ve seçilen içerikteki savunmasızlık kaynaklarına yönelik daha yüksek bir farkındalık düzeyi oluşturmayı amaçlamaktadır. Devlet, belediyeler ve hizmet sağlayıcılar da dahil olmak üzere tüm paydaşlar, engellilerin topluma kazandırma sorumluluğuna sahiptir. Toplumun tüm bireylerinin koordinasyon içinde çalışması, engelli bireylere yönelik toplumsal farkındalığın artmasını sağlayacak ve bu da daha fazla toplumsal iş birliğine ve refaha katkıda bulunacaktır.

Bu çalışmadan elde edilen bulgular, potansiyel olarak engelli bireyler için adil perakende ve alışveriş merkezi hizmetlerinin tanıtımına ve tasarımına katkıda bulunacaktır. Ayrıca çalışma, perakende hizmetlerini ve alışveriş ortamlarının hizmetlerini engelli bireyler için daha iyi hale getirecektir.