

Children's knowledge about the terms "Muslim", "Jew", "Roma" and "gypsy"

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This article summarises the results of a representative study in Germany on 6- to 13-year-olds' knowledge and prejudices with regard to Jews, Muslims, Roma and "gypsies".

If, in quality television for children, the aim is to avoid and purposefully counteract prejudices, it is necessary to find out what prior knowledge children possess.

Whereas there are regular studies on the prejudices of adults in Germany (e.g. Zick et al., 2016), nothing is known about what children living in Germany associate with ethnic and religious groups such as Jews, Muslims, Roma and "gypsies", or about the extent to which they agree with some common prejudices. The IZI therefore put these questions to n=840 representatively selected German children between the ages of 6 and 13.¹

KNOWING AND BEING ABLE TO EXPLAIN

In response to the question "Do you know the term [Jew, Roma, Muslim, gypsy], and do you know what it means?", 13% of the 6- to 13-year-olds said they had never heard the word "Jew", 7% did not know the word "Muslim", 18% did not know the term "gypsy", and 48% did not know "Roma". Children's conceptual knowledge is therefore – apart from the term "Roma" – relatively high.

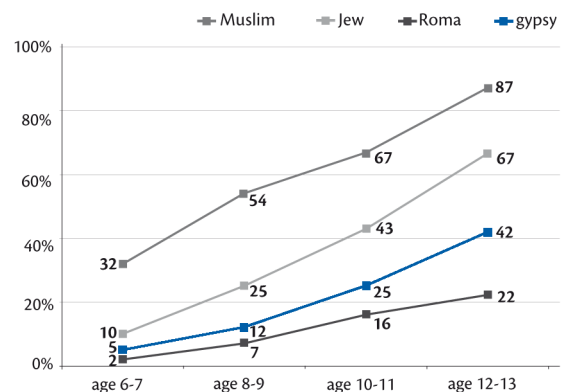
However, the proportion of children who, in addition, are able to explain the term is significantly lower (Ill. 1). The term "Muslim" proved here to be the most well-known, whereas only a few children had any concept of the term "Jew". The figure is even lower for children and pre-teens who have a concept of the meaning of the politically incorrect term "gypsy", or who know who the "Roma" are.

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE TERM "JEW"

In response to the question "Do you know the term 'Jew' and do you know what this term means?", half of the 6- to 13-year-olds said they have heard the term before but did not know what it meant. Over a third of the respondents (36%) felt they could explain the term, with the proportion rising in an almost linear manner as age increased – as with the other explanations of terms too – from 10% among the 6- to 7-year-olds to 67% among the 12- to 13-year-olds. When the children were asked to explain what they understood by the term "Jew", 27% referred, inter alia, to the con-

text of religion. Understandably, only a few 6- to 7-year-olds (8%) did so. In the case of the 8- to 9-year-olds it was just under a quarter (23%), which then rose to just under a third of the 10- to 11-year-olds (32%) and to not quite half of the 12- to 13-year-olds (46%). Children whose parents had attended less academic German schools ("Primary School" or "Secondary General School"), were less able to classify the term "Jew" correctly.

Other explanatory approaches to the term "Jew" included reference to geographical origin, e.g. "They live in Israel" (8%). Only rarely (4%) did the children mention the context of persecution in their explanation of the term. Individual statements were related to modes of behaviour, e.g. "They quarrel with other nations" (1%) or the context of appearance, e.g. "They wear a kippah" (1%).



Ill. 1: Proportion of 6- to 13-year-olds who believe they can explain terms such as "Muslim", "Jew", "Roma" and "gypsy" (n=840)

How "Roma" is explained	Children (n=98 out of 840) who know the term "Roma"
1. another word for gypsies	40.8 %
2. a population group	19.4 %
3. come from Eastern Europe	11.2 %
4. come from Romania	9.2 %
5. come from Rome/are Italians	8.2 %
6. live in caravans or on the streets	7.1 %
7. people who beg	6.1 %

Ill. 2: Explanations of the term "Roma" (multiple explanations possible)

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE TERM "MUSLIM"

A third of the 6- to 7-year-olds, over half of the 8- to 9-year-olds and 87% of the 12- to 13-year-olds knew the term "Muslim" and could explain it.

When the children explained the term "Muslim", over a fifth (22%) of the 6- to 7-year-olds, over half of the 10- to 11-year-olds (53%) and over three-quarters (76%) of the 12- to 13-year-olds referred, inter alia, to the context of religion. Depending on the age of the children, there were statements such as "It's a particular religion", "They believe in a different God", "[They] read the Koran" or "The men go to the mosque".

However, explanations for "Muslim" were also contextualised geographically, and 13% of the 6- to 13-year-olds explained the term with, for example, "They are Turks" or "They come from Arabic countries". One in 10 children associated a particular lifestyle with the term, in particular, "They are not allowed to eat pork", or they referred to a different category – appearance – as a distinguishing feature, e.g. "Women wear a headscarf".

tions given were, most frequently, "another word for gypsies" or "an ethnic group". Geographical locations were also mentioned, e.g. "They come from Eastern Europe", or even prejudices that had been passed down, such as "They live on the streets and beg" (Ill. 2).

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE TERM "GYPSY"

Although it was indeed the case that somewhat more primary school children knew the politically incorrect term "gypsy" than the term "Roma" and were more frequently able to explain it, the number here, too, remained at a low level (5% of the 6- to 7-year-olds and 12% of the 8- to 9-year-olds). Most frequently,

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE TERM "ROMA"

The term the children were least familiar with was "Roma", with only 98 of the 840 respondents having any idea of its meaning. In fact, in the case of the 12- to 13-year-olds, only every fifth (22%) had a concept of the term.

The few explanations

the term was described with "They live in caravans" or "They travel around". Some saw the term as synonymous with Roma; others saw it as a term of abuse. Only 13 out of 840 respondents in total saw "gypsies" as a population group. Instead, a number of children associated the term with "people who beg" or "people who steal", or saw it, overall, as a term of abuse (Ill. 3). When asked about typical antiziganistic stereotypes such as "Gypsies in Germany often have no permanent residence", only a few primary school children but over a third of the 12- to 13-year-olds agreed with these stereotypes. In fact, every fifth 10- to 13-year-old agreed with the statement "Most of the gypsies in Germany do not go to school", although at least the older children should have rejected this statement when considering that schooling is compulsory in Germany. Only 1 in 10 primary school children agreed with the clearly antiziganistic statement "Many gypsies in Germany live by stealing and begging"; among the 10- to 13-year-olds it was almost every fourth child. This shows, therefore, an almost linear increase in agreement with antiziganistic statements as the age of the children increases, which

How "gypsy" is explained	Children (n=176 out of 840) who know the term "gypsy"
1. live in caravans or on the streets	44.9 %
2. travel around / have no permanent residence	22.7 %
3. another word for "Roma"	14.8 %
4. term of abuse / insult	9.1 %
5. a population group	7.4 %
6. foreigners	6.3 %
7. steal, criminals, people who beg	5.7 %

Ill. 3: Explanations of the term "gypsy" (multiple explanations possible)

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then carries forward into adolescence and adulthood (Zick et al., 2016, p. 50). Children therefore very clearly associate the term “gypsy”, a foreign appellation and historically highly loaded (Fings, 2008), with antiziganistic prejudices. Opfermann argues that the word “gypsy” inherently contains a derogatory semantics which cannot be detached from the designation and is therefore preserved and passed on every time the word is used (Opfermann, 2007), and this is also true in the case of children. It is therefore important to avoid using the politically incorrect designation around children, and to provide them with background knowledge on the term and its discriminatory meaning through appropriate stories and methodologically focused, systematic units of information.

Counteracting the development of prejudices

PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN AS A PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE GROUP

Most of the questioned German primary school children were lacking the building blocks of knowledge here, and it was only in the case of “Muslim” that just under half of the children of primary school age had any concept of the term. In the unprompted statements there were only a few negative judgements which could be classed as prejudices. In terms of content, this is understandable, for German children and pre-teens have a high chance of encountering Muslims in their everyday lives and therefore of getting to know them primarily as people. This counteracts the development of prejudices (e.g. Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014). However, the chance of meeting Jews or Roma and Sinti in their everyday lives is significantly lower. This is precisely why it is important to have a

well implemented teaching unit, as is provided for in most German primary school curricula for years 3 and 4 (age about 8-10) (e.g. within religious studies lessons). This representative study has shown that the pupils remember little more than a knowledge of the terms from the targeted curricular content, which at least most of them – at least in theory – must have taken part in. Mostly, there is no provision for learning about the Roma or Sinti minority in the pedagogical context of German primary schools. This is why there is a low level of knowledge even with regard to “Roma”. The children are indeed a little more familiar with the word “gypsy”, but it is connected with very clear antiziganistic tendencies. Research on prejudice has shown that middle childhood is the decisive phase in the development of prejudices. The basic tendency here is: the more prejudices children have developed by the end of their childhood, the more tenaciously these are likely to linger (see vom Orde in this issue).

As the current representative study shows, children in Germany have a knowledge of the terms, but many children lack any concept of their content or contextualisation. If children and pre-teens know a term and are therefore potentially able to categorise people into ethnic or religious groups, yet have no concept or knowledge in order to be able to contextualise these groups, they are vulnerable to prejudices based on definitions of meanings, e.g. promoted by the media or extremist actors.

The results of the study clearly suggest the need to make up much ground here. On the one hand, there must be a focus on developing children’s knowledge of religions other than Christianity, and – at the very least, out of a sense of German historical responsibility – particularly that of Judaism. On the other hand, the example of antiziganism clearly shows how necessary it is to purposefully counteract and soften up images and prejudices.

Particularly where a direct encounter is not possible, media-based encounters can create the necessary pro-social concepts. Well-made television and film stories, which involve children emotionally, have a good chance here – as long as they are reflectively and purposefully designed to avoid and break down prejudices. ■

NOTE

¹ Conducted by IconKids & Youth, n=439 boys and n=401 girls were sampled according to the age, sex and migration background of the respondents, the school-leaving qualifications of the head of the household, and the distribution according to German federal states and municipal size classes as well as the mother’s marital status. Duration of the study: 6 September to 1 October 2018.

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