

Traditional Families in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Though disasters, especially earthquakes, floods and landslides, are common in Turkey, policy making, planning and even research have ignored their social-psychological aspects. In this paper an attempt is made to build a hypothetical model for conceptualizing disaster-related coping behavior in traditional society. It is based on individual, familial and social behavior and values, derived from research conducted in Turkey. In this model it is proposed that belief in external control, in fitting with the objective conditions, results in resignation and in the conception of disaster as inevitable. Close-knit family and community ties provide further relief and security in the face of disaster. This primary group solidarity also provides the mechanisms necessary for coping with disaster in the context of underdevelopment where formal social welfare organizations are inadequate.

Introduction

Most common natural disasters are earthquakes, floods and landslides in Turkey. The Anatolian peninsula is on one of the two principal active earthquake regions of the world for large shallow earthquakes (magnitude 7.9 and greater). This is the wedge-shaped area lying across southern Asia, Asia Minor and the Mediterranean regions, extending from Portugal to China.

Since the biggest earthquake in Erzurum in 1939 where 30.000 people died, six more earthquakes in Varto, Gediz, Gönen, Burdur, Bingöl and Lice took away many more thousands of lives. Together with the magnitude of the shocks, the poor quality of housing and constructions is responsible for the large numbers of casualties.

Floods and landslides are also frequent and cause loss of lives, livestock and property, though their severity is less

than that of earthquakes. The Anatolian peninsula has been one of the most populated regions of the world throughout history. Land exploitation and the consequent deforestation are contributing factors to floods and landslides together with the abundance of rivers and mountainous land formations and the inadequacy of the dam capacity.

Natural disasters necessitate relocation of populations, new land-use, adjustments and planning. Thus, they present social and psychological problems together with technological and economic ones. Yet, policy making, government action and even research focus mainly on the material aspects of disasters, approaching the problem from purely technological, economic and planning perspectives, ignoring social-psychological aspects.

As research is not directed to the social and psychological aspects of disaster behavior, per se, in this paper the discussions will be based on more general observations and research results. We can develop an insight into how disasters are understood and explained and how people deal with them if we study the structure and functioning of the society and the family.

Thus we will attempt to point to certain relevant aspects of the family structure and functioning together with individual social-psychological characteristics to develop such an insight into two aspects of disaster-related behavior. One of these is the conception and explanation of disaster; the other is coping with disaster. The analysis and conceptualization of the former behavior will be mainly at the individual level and that of the latter will focus on the family.

Conception of Disaster

Man has always felt small and helpless in the face of natural disasters. With scientific and technological advances, this sense of helplessness is being gradually superseded by a sense of competence and control over nature. Even today, however, not everybody shares such an outlook of mastery over nature to the same extent. A great deal of research in various parts of the world has dealt with this issue of perceived competence versus helplessness in man's relation with nature.

This issue found an expression, in Kluckhohn's basic value orientations (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961) and

was later conceptualized within the individual modernization approach as a characteristic of "modern" man (Smith and Inkeles, 1966; Inkeles, 1969; Dawson, 1967; Doob, 1967; Kahl, 1968; Suzman, 1973; Kagitcibasi, 1973).

In the words of Triandis (1971:8) "(Modern man)... feels that man can be the master over nature, and that he controls the reinforcements he receives from his environment; he believes in determinism and science... and he is optimistic about controlling his environment. (Traditional man, on the other hand)... feels at the mercy of obscure environmental forces and is prone to mysticism... He does not believe that he can control his environment but rather sees himself under the influence of external, mystical powers".

Closely associated with the dichotomy of mastery over nature versus being at the mercy of nature is the dichotomy of belief in the internal versus external control of reinforcement. First developed by Rotter (1966), belief in internal control of reinforcement symbolizes a tendency to assume full responsibility for one's actions and lot in life, as contrasted with a tendency to attribute this responsibility to an outside agent, such as God, fate, other people, etc, which, indicates a belief in external control or a fatalistic tendency. Observations and research evidence point to a general increase of the belief in internal control with modernization.

A general outlook on life which is characterized by a sense of competence and autonomy is probably the important factor that is shared by a feeling of control over nature and a belief in internal control. I suggest that this general outlook is relevant to how disasters are conceived by people.

In a study dealing with psychological aspects of social change and modernization in Turkey (Kagitcibasi, 1973) it was found that certain attitudinal tendencies clustered together to form two distinct social psychological outlooks on life. The first cluster, including belief in internal control of reinforcement, optimism about personal future and achievement values symbolized a "modern" outlook. The second cluster, reflecting a more traditional orientation, consisted of anomia (Srole, 1956), religiosity, pessimism about personal future and authoritarianism.

These modern and traditional outlooks in youth were found to be differentially associated with two family-

level variables, namely, family affection and family control. It appeared that a family emotional atmosphere characterized by affection in child rearing was conducive to the development of a modern outlook in the young person growing up in that family. Conversely, a family emotional atmosphere characterized by control seemed to develop a traditional outlook in the young person.

Furthermore, the social-structural characteristics of the family were found to relate to the kind of emotional atmosphere in which the young members of the family were socialized. In rural and lower socio-economic-status conditions, the control oriented socialization was found to be prevalent and appeared to be conducive to the development of belief in external-control and fatalistic tendencies in the young.

Other research (e.g. Frey, 1963; Lerner, 1958) has also noted the fatalistic tendencies among peasants in Turkey. The analysis above in terms of family socialization attempts to uncover some of the causes of this common observation. In another piece of research on sojourn experience (Kagitcibasi, 1978) belief in internal control was found to increase among young people after a school year spent abroad, indicating an increase in self-reliance and efficacy. This increase of belief in internal control was, furthermore, again an inherent part of a general trend of modernization.

These research findings and observations lead us to expect belief in external control and fatalistic tendencies to be prevalent among people who are more often victims of natural disasters -- the urban poor and the rural peasants. They would tend to perceive natural disasters as inevitable and as bad fortune that has to be endured. Accordingly, the explanations they give for disasters would be mystical and would resort to supernatural forces.

Such an orientation toward natural disasters is functional given the prevailing objective conditions. For most of the people involved, it is, indeed, not possible to control nature. They do not have access to reliable forecasting by sophisticated seismographic techniques; prevention of floods is inadequate; and the quality of housing cannot be improved drastically given their economic means. Thus, acceptance and resignation to "God's will" appear to be the only alternative outlook available to the traditional

poor people who are vulnerable. Such resignation with religious overtones provides psychological relief and social solidarity through community religion as well as a sense of belongingness. Fatalistic acceptance and belief in external control are perpetuated through socialization and are reinforced by the objective conditions of life.

Coping With Disaster

In the above discussion, the support function of religious fatalism was emphasized in accepting and enduring natural disasters. Another important support function is served by social solidarity in enduring and especially coping with natural disaster.

Social solidarity at the extended family, kin, neighborhood and community level is found to be a very important source of support in traditional society where formal institutional support is insufficient. The functions served by formal organizations and institutions in the industrial urban context are served by the informal action of the closely knit extended primary group in the rural areas. This is especially the case in developing countries like Turkey where the primordial ties are still quite strong (e.g. Kiray, 1968; Kolars, 1962; Stirling, 1965; Hinderink and Kiray, 1970; Abadan-Unat et al, 1976).

Even in the lower socio-economic-status urban or semi-urban (gecekondu) areas, composed of former rural residents who migrated into the cities, the close ties of mutual support are not yet replaced with institutional support (Kongar, 1972; Dubetsky, 1976; Karpat, 1976; Senyapili, 1976). This situation of informal adjustments does not support the view that the family is dissolving and transferring its functions to the bureaucratic organizations (Ogburn, 1962) or is in cooperation with them (Litwak, 1965).

In emergencies informal support assumes even greater importance. Specifically, at the time people move from rural villages into large cities, their established life patterns are greatly disturbed, requiring new modes of activity. This turmoil brings with it feelings of insecurity and uncertainty.

The way the migrants tolerate it and cope with it is through the support of the former migrants -- family and kin from the same original region (e.g. Yasa, 1966; Suzuki,

1964, 1966; Karpat, 1976) -- the primary group functioning as a "buffer mechanism" (Kiray, 1968). This objective situation is reflected in the values, as primary group support is **expected** at times of need. Thus social values and norms fit with the objective socio-economic conditions and are reinforced by them.

Support is especially expected from the immediate family, mostly focusing on (adult) children. The results of a nation-wide study on the "Value of Children" (VOC) for parents (Kagitcibasi, 1979, 1982) provides us with some relevant information about expectations from children at emergency situations. As the Turkish VOC Study is part of the nine-country comparative Value of Children (VOC) Project, we can compare the results with those from the other countries. (The other countries that participated in the VOC study are Indonesia, Korea, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Germany and USA.) Counting on sons for support in emergencies was highest in Turkey.

Of special significance is the overall finding of reduced expectations from children for emergency situations in more developed countries, namely the U.S. and Singapore. No German data are available on this topic. However, from the responses to similar questions, low level of expected help should characterize this population as well. Singapore is considered to be the most developed country in east Asia after Japan, with a well developed social welfare system. The pattern of responses in Singapore and the U.S. are quite different from those in the rest of the VOC countries, where children are heavily relied on for emergency help.

Thus, in the context of development, formal institutions have replaced the informal support systems for crisis intervention. In the low income countries, however, with inadequate social welfare systems where formal organizations are less available for support, the primary group continues to serve its support function in emergencies. The values and expectations reflect this state of affairs, as well, as evidenced by greater expectations from sons for support and a high value put on filial loyalty as well as on extended family obligations in more traditional contexts.

As natural disasters involve extreme emergency and crisis situations, the above tendencies would be expected to become even more acute in coping with disasters.

Specifically, the less the availability of institutional support during and after disasters, the greater reliance on informal support would be expected. Thus, family and relatives who are not hit by disaster, are, indeed, expected to open up their homes to the victims, to support them in various ways.

This support has been observed to take the form of reconstructing homes, collaborating in work and sharing income and land, caring for orphans, the aged and other family members left behind, and most importantly emotional support. There is evidence that the primary group serves similar functions and indulges in helping behavior at times of emergency even in the developed urban society (Joe Perry et al, in this volume).

When perception of disaster and coping with disaster are viewed together, it is seen that there is a close fit between them and that they are affected in similar ways by the same environmental conditions and by social change. Specifically, in the context of poverty and inadequate technological and organizational development, individuals feel less competent and more at the mercy of fate. Thus, they accept disasters in religious resignation which helps them endure disasters as well as enforcing social solidarity through feelings of belongingness to the same community religion. Social solidarity, in turn, especially in terms of closely-knit familial ties helps individuals cope with disasters. This feedback mechanism remains functional as long as formal support remains insufficient.

This conceptualization is proposed here as a general framework for approaching individual and group perception of and coping with disasters in the context of underdevelopment. It points to the need to consider economic, social structural, familial and individual level variables in relation to one another. In schematic presentation the relations hypothesized in this paper form figure 1.

As indicated before, there is research evidence supporting some of the above hypothesized relations. However, this research, having been done in other contexts, provides only indirect support for the above model. Disaster-related behavior, both in terms of perceptions and coping mechanisms, should be studied directly to test the validity of the model. This kind of research would

develop an understanding of human conceptual and coping mechanisms in regard to disaster in traditional society in the context of underdevelopment.

Figure 1: Hypothetical Model for Coping With Disaster in the Context of Underdevelopment

