

The Stigma Experiences of Parent With A Delinquent Child

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article Type: Research Article</p> <p>Keywords: Stigma, juvenile delinquency, parent, qualitative study</p> <p>Corresponding Author(s) ¹ Şerif UZUNASLAN ² Metin Gani Tapan</p> <p>Adress: ¹ Firat University, Elazığ, Turkey ² Kilis 7 Aralık University, Kilis, Turkey.</p> <p>E-mail: ¹ serifuzunaslanfb@gmail.com suzunaslan@firat.edu.tr ² metinganii@hotmail.com</p>	<p><i>Child delinquency continues to be a serious social problem. It has been determined that 25.3% of the children who come or are brought to the security units in Turkey are dragged into crime. This situation has negative consequences for the delinquent children and their families. Stigmatization is the most dominant and wearisome of these negative consequences. In this study, we investigated the stigmatization experiences of parents with delinquent children. We conducted qualitative interviews with 10 parents who have a child delinquent for different reasons and receive social assistance. As a result of the analysis of the interviews, we identified two main themes; (a) reasons for juvenile delinquency; and (b) having a delinquent child. Under the theme of having a delinquent child, we created 3 sub-themes depending on the types of stigma. (1) social stigma, (2) relational stigma, and (3) self-stigma. The findings show that parents have to deal with intersecting inequalities such as being immigrants, being of different ethnicity, being poor and having delinquent children. The feeling of loneliness, social exclusion, pressure from the neighborhood and being blamed as the cause of the problem are other prominent results of the interviews.</i></p>

INTRODUCTION

The delinquency of children remains a significant social problem that has negative effects on both victims and society as a whole (Bobbio et al., 2020). Juvenile delinquency is considered an important social issue in Turkey due to its impact on families and the wider community (Ayar & Ozturk, 2015; Bülül & Doğan, 2016; Güneş & Gökler, 2017; Karataş, 2020; Karataş & Mavili, 2019; Saruç & Güneş, 2014). According to the Child Protection Law of Turkey, a juvenile delinquent is someone who is being investigated or prosecuted for a crime or for whom a security measure has been implemented following their commission of an offense (Official Gazette of the Republic of Turkey, 2005).

TUIK reported in 2021 that 114,038 children brought or taken into custody were involved in criminal activities. Of these, 31.4% were for causing injury, 30.5% for theft, 5.0% for using, selling, or purchasing drugs or stimulants, 4.4% for making threats, and 3.4% for violating passport laws (TUIK, 2022).

Studies show that juveniles experience social and psychological problems following delinquency, with the nature of the crime determining the extent of the problem (Kroska et al., 2017; Ranga & Kavita, 2021). The most significant negative impact is stigma, which leads to exclusion, discrimination, and social, economic, and psychological issues (Kavish et al., 2016; Sheehan et al., 2022). This stigmatization negatively affects an individual's socialization process, daily life practices, and social relationships. Consequently, the stigmatized person experiences difficulty in establishing positive social engagements, which leads to skepticism, depression, and anxiety and general distrust towards society (Slattery, 2007). The stigmatized person also feels constantly monitored and under scrutiny.

In his monograph "Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity," published in 1963, Goffman explored how people with devalued and stigmatized identities cope with their social status. This stigmatization extends to the social environment of the affected individual, according to Goffman, who mentions two groups: those bearing the same stigma and the immediately surrounding environment, comprising family, friends, and loved ones. The immediate environment experiences relational stigma relative to the degree of its closeness to the stigmatized individual (Goffman, 2020; Kavish et al., 2016). The stigma of juvenile delinquency also negatively impacts the families, friends, and other close relationships of the affected person.

The situation of delinquent children underlines the importance of understanding the effect of relational stigma on their parents. The aim of this study is to explore the stigmas faced by parents of delinquent children and the negative experiences related to delinquency. The literature lacks adequate studies investigating the perspectives and experiences of parents with delinquent children regarding stigmatization, highlighting the need and originality of research on this subject.

1. METHOD

This study is based on the qualitative study data conducted in Gaziantep Yurt-Ay Derneği, which offers social support to parents stigmatized due to their children's situation. The study aims to uncover the stigmatization experiences of parents with delinquent children.

1.1. Procedure

In the ethical process of the research, firstly, permission was obtained from Gaziantep Yurt-Ay Derneği, where the study was conducted. After obtaining permission, pre-interviews were made with the participants and the parents who volunteered were included in the study. Written consent was obtained from the participants before the interviews began. Interviews were held between 15.07.2022 and 15.09.2022 by creating a special appointment for each participant.

1.2. Research population

In 2022, ten interviews were conducted with four fathers and six mothers. All of these participants are included in the study (see Table 1). The first analysis revealed that parents with delinquent children share certain characteristics. It has been determined that these features are important in the delinquency of children, including: (a) a lack of language skills; (b) living in economic poverty; (c) having an immigrant background; (d) having many children; (e) low level of education; and (f) scattered family structures. Five of these parents lived apart from their spouses. The majority of the mothers were either divorced, legally separated, or in the process of separating at the time of the interview. The other five parents were married and living with their spouses. Parents had between two and four children, and their educational backgrounds ranged from finishing elementary school to high school. None of the parents had graduated from university. Four of the mothers identify ethnically as Kurdish and had immigrated to Gaziantep. Two of the fathers also identify ethnically as Kurds, while four parents identify ethnically as Turkish. Additionally, it was observed that these parents lived in neighborhoods with low economic levels.

Table 1 Informant characteristics

Pseudonym	Marital status/ partnership	Education	Years in Gaziantep	Language	Economical situation	Number of children	Type of Crime
M1	Widower	No university degree	10-17	Kurdish	People in poverty	4	Theft
M2	Married	No university degree	>21	Kurdish	People in poverty	3	Murder
M3	Married	No university degree	Since birth	Kurdish	People in poverty	4	Substance use
M4	Married	No university degree	Since birth	Turkish	People in poverty	4	Substance use / Theft
M5	Divorced	No university degree	>13	Kurdish	People in poverty	3	Substance use
M 6	Divorced	No university degree	Since birth	Turkish	People in poverty	3	Theft
F1	Widower	No university degree	Since birth	Kurdish	People in poverty	4	Substance use
F2	Divorced	No university degree	Since birth	Turkish	People in poverty	3	Substance use/ Selling
F3	Married	No university degree	>5	Kurdish	People in poverty	4	Theft
F4	Married	No university degree	Since birth	Turkish	People in poverty	2	Theft

In the examples of statements taken from the interviewees in the study, each participant [M1, Widower, Immigrant, Kurdish, Theft] was given a large introductory code in parentheses. The participant code, provided to the participants, includes Father/Mother, Marital status/partnership, Immigration, Ethnicity, and the type of crime committed by the child.

1.3. Interview

In Gaziantep Yurt-Ay Derneği, which we conducted research in, a total of 40 children who are drug addicts and delinquents receive social support. We conducted in-depth interviews with a total of 10 parents - 6 mothers and 4 fathers - from the families of the children who received social support from the association and agreed to participate in the research. Qualitative research was preferred as we aimed to reach the subjective thoughts and feelings of the parents. We held separate interviews with each of the 10 parents, allowing them to speak freely while adhering to the general framework of the research. Semi-structured questions were asked during the interviews, which were recorded with the consent of the participants using a voice recorder. Each interview took between 40-60 minutes, and participant codes were used to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

1.4 Analysis

In the process of analyzing the data, first of all, the audio recordings taken during the interviews were deciphered. 10 interviews recorded on the voice recorder were transcribed and a separate file was prepared for each interviewer. The data transferred to the manuscript was read from beginning to end many times. Then, the audio recordings were divided into themes according to their similarities and differences in accordance with the purpose of the research. The themes of the 10 interviews were compared to establish the main themes and then reanalyzed with reference to the relevant statements and categories.

1.5 Ethical approval

This study was approved by Kilis University Ethics Committee (Decision No. 7, 2022). Informed consent was prepared prior to the interview. Consent forms contain information about the purpose of the study, the interview process, data analysis, the use of data, how the valuable opinions of the parents contributed to the study, the confidentiality and anonymity of the records, and study participants. The consent form was verbally explained to the parents and signed. The participant's voluntariness was preserved throughout the entire interview process. They didn't have to discuss anything they weren't comfortable with and could leave at any time during the interview. Participants were given the contact number of the first author in case they had any questions about the study. Coding was used instead of the actual names of the participants.

2. RESULTS

Parents applied to Gaziantep Yurt-Ay Derneği to get social support for their children who got involved in crime. It is understood that these parents usually reached out to the association immediately after their children's substance use and delinquent behavior. These parents, who have low levels of education and income, are immigrants with diverse ethnic backgrounds. During their experiences related to their children, they explained two main themes and four sub-themes. The main themes are (a) reasons for delinquency and (b) having delinquent children. The sub-themes under these two themes are (1) relational stigma, (2) social stigma, and (3) self-stigma.

2.1. Reasons for Delinquency

In line with the information obtained from the interviews, it has been understood that the educational status, immigration status, family structure, socio-economic level, and the location are effective in children's delinquency (Kang & Burton, 2014; Moitra et al., 2018; Ranga & Kavita, 2021). When evaluated from the ecological system perspective, we can say that the environment and risk factors are effective in dragging the child into crime. Most families interviewed came to city centers due to internal migration and experienced a change in environment. Those who migrated to new environments and ghettos carried risk factors. The physical environment has prevented children from being dragged into crime, as expressed by many parents interviewed, including two mothers and one father.

My child was okay. However, the influence of the kids in this neighborhood changed him. Trust me, the people of Nizip are aware of this neighborhood. There are several individuals possessing convictions. If I had the financial means, I would have moved to a different area, but it never occurred... (M1, Widower, Immigrant, Kurdish, Theft).

Our area is called "Hoşgör." Unfortunately, there is a high number of delinquent children here, and this neighborhood is well-known in Antep. We have lived here for four years, and our difficulties have increased. There is a great deal of physical violence and hostility between us and the child... (M4, Married, Domestic, Turkish, Substance Use/Theft).

The Düztepe neighborhood of Antep is notorious for its drug dealers and the sale of drugs in Çamlık. My son befriended undesirable individuals in this neighborhood, leading to a decline in his behavior (F1, Widower, Domestic, Kurdish, Substance Use).

Apart from the neighborhood they live in, particularly the social environment, school and peer groups stand out as reasons why children are inclined towards criminal behavior. Studies conducted in Turkey and other countries reveal that migration, ethnicity, education, poverty, ghettoization, and cultural differences are among the reasons for juvenile delinquency (Kang & Burton, 2014; Walburg, 2018; Wallner & Stemmler, 2014). Immigrants, who have ethnic and cultural diversity, experience social and psychological adaptation problems in their new environments. The challenging adaptation process results in immigrants' past lifestyles and traditions deteriorating, raising the likelihood of being pulled into criminal activities. Children, who are among the most vulnerable groups, are particularly influenced by this situation. Some parents who participated in the study migrated internally to Gaziantep, where the negative impacts of migration were seen to be responsible for dragging children into crime. Speaking a different language, living in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and problems with social cohesion are among the contributing factors. One of the interviewees' fathers provides an example of this situation.

We came from Antalya last year. We settled in Düztepe, a well-known neighborhood in Gaziantep. There's a lot of crime here, and it's a poor neighborhood. After my son Mert moved here, he could not adapt. Then he made bad friends and started committing crimes. There is also substance abuse, you know. He then dropped out of school... (F1, Widower, Domestic, Kurdish, Substance Use).

When all the reasons for juvenile delinquency are examined, it is understood that intersecting inequalities are effective. Intersectionality argues that the social positions of individuals emerge not from the sum of oppression systems such as ethnicity, patriarchy and class, but at the intersection of these systems (Afyonoğlu, 2020; Muller-Fabian, 2016). In other words, migration, poverty, lack of education, and family structure alone cannot explain the child's delinquency experience. The situation of the juvenile delinquent can be determined by the intersection of other factors such as ethnic origin, economic status, place, family structure, language, and immigration.

2.2. Having A Delinquent Child

The confusion and trauma of having a juvenile delinquent family member creates many social, psychological, and economic problems for other members of the family. This puts a lot of responsibility, especially on parents. Parents may not only meet the needs of the child in trouble but also have to cope with stigma, exclusion, and social isolation (Pickett, 2017). For parents, this process can be uncomfortable and costly. Parents' experiences of having a delinquent child were presented by creating sub-themes. These are: (1) relational stigma, (2) social stigma, and (3) self-stigma.

2.2.1. Relational Stigma

Stigma doesn't just affect stigmatized things— it also affects the immediate environment of stigmatized people both socially and psychologically. Relational stigma is the term used to describe the stigma attached to the stigmatized individual and their surroundings (Corrigan et al., 2014). It can be deduced from the aforementioned information that the stigma and the stigmatization process are complex. Simultaneously, it is evident that individual differences like crime, disability, sexual orientation, etc. are accentuated in the same process. However, it's impossible to evaluate the stigma and the emergence of stigma independently without considering the societal framework in which the individual exists.

People who occupy a dominant and powerful stature in society label and stigmatize people who live as minorities, weak individuals, or socially inferior people due to their differences. Nonetheless, the primary reason for stigmatizing people who pose differences is their placement as “disadvantaged” and “inferior” within the society they reside in (Göregenli, 2013). The study shows that parents are commonly exposed to relational stigma. The parents state that their social surroundings display a prejudiced, exclusionary and stigmatizing outlook towards them due to their children’s condition. One mother and father’s statement from the interviews exemplifies this situation.

If you have a child who is involved in a crime, uses or sells drugs, everyone looks bad. My child’s drug dealing leaves me helpless. I was called from the police station once. Your child is said to have been involved in a crime. The police there behaved strangely and saw me as a salesman (F2, Divorced, Domestic, Turkish, Substance Use/Selling).

Neighbors began to keep a little distance. So they stay away from me because they are afraid that they will be harmed. This theft business is bad. My child has been tried in court three times. They treated me strangely in court, too. As his father, they treated me as if I had committed the same crime (F3, Married, Immigrant, Kurdish, Theft).

The concepts of normal and deviation existing in the society they live in are effective in the stigmatization of parents who have children who have been dragged into crime. In other words, “having a delinquent child” has a negative social and social context. Goffman attributes this situation to the emergence and development of stigma in the language of daily relations bibliography. According to him, this is a problem that belongs entirely to the social structure. When these explanations are evaluated, it is understood that the attitudes and behaviors developed by the environment against this situation are effective due to the negative experiences of parents due to having a delinquent child.

2.2.2. Social Stigma

Social stigma refers to the social and psychological reactions of society towards a stigmatized individual and group. It also includes cognitive, sensory, and behavioral reactions of individuals in society towards stigmatized individuals and groups (Bos et al., 2013). It is understood that parents who experience victimization because of their children are excluded from the environment they live in and are deemed different (Pickett, 2017). Parents have withdrawn from social life due to reactions and prejudices from the environment. They experience feelings of loneliness and isolation after social and psychological reactions. Most parents have lost their social support system, especially when family and close circles distance themselves quickly. One of the interviewees’ parents’ stories exemplifies this situation.

Before, I was walking around comfortably, I had neighbors, we used to travel together, now they’re all gone. I don’t want to see anyone anymore. I am embarrassed. I guess people exclude themselves... (M2, Married, Immigrant, Kurdish, Murder).

Neighbors began to keep a little distance. Because they are afraid that they will be harmed. It was as if I was responsible for everything, and they blamed me as his father... (F4, Married, Domestic, Turkish, Theft).

Parents felt powerless and lonely as the social environment moved away from them. Many of the parents were undecided about whom to seek help from in order to cope with this situation. They also felt under surveillance. They had the difficulty of living under the surveillance of their environment.

2.2.3. Self Stigma

Self-stigmatization includes stigmatizing thoughts that individuals have about themselves. Self-stigma reflects the social and psychological impact of owning a stigma. It reflects both the anxiety of being stigmatized and the possible internalization of negative beliefs and emotions associated with the stigmatized situation (Corrigan et al., 2014). All of the parents participating in the study blamed themselves for the situation they were in. They knew that the environment was to blame. They accepted these accusations largely helplessly. They stated that they “neglect their children,” “they are ignorant,” “they are poor,” “they do not have a good job.” Therefore, they feel that they cannot offer their children a good life. The expression of an internally displaced mother of a different ethnic origin exemplifies self-stigmatization.

People also feel inadequate. So if I were a good mother, would the child be like this? (M2, Married, Immigrant, Kurdish, Murder).

A father of different ethnic origins stigmatizes himself as a “bad father”.

The environment generally expects something from people as a father, so my duty as a father is to protect the child from bad friends, but it is my own fault, I could not protect most of me from bad friends... (F1, Widower, Domestic, Kurdish, Substance Use).

Da fact dat dese parents lack a social support system increases da effect of stigma and leaves dem vulnerable. Parents stated dat da problem dey experienced became more n more complex bcoz dey could not find support from their environment n institutions. It was observed dat da parents experienced intense feelings of loneliness with self-stigmatization. Anuva effect of self-stigmatization is dat da individual feels powerless n helpless.

I'm tired. I was alone. The children's father was indifferent. There was never any support. Seeing that one's children are bad, one feels powerless and helpless. I'm exhausted. I would probably commit suicide if it weren't for sin...(M5, Divorced, Immigrant, Kurdish, Substance Use).

In line with what the parents said, it is understood that their children lost control of their own lives due to the situation. Parents who devote themselves to their children's problems are left alone with their own problems.

3. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this article was to examine and reveal problems experienced by parents of delinquent children. The parents in this study stated experiencing social, psychological, and economic problems due to their children and thus felt helpless. The situation caused them to be stigmatized. Their children's delinquency and their experiences caused them to struggle with relational and social stigma as well as self-stigma. The criminal approach adopted in juvenile justice system practices increases the stigmatizing effects (Tuncer et al., 2020). Within the study scope, clear stigmatizing effects were observed.

The immigration status, language, ethnicity differences, economic status, and education level of the parents determine the probability of children being dragged into crime. This result supports studies that state environmental factors are effective in the child's delinquency (Majdak, 2006). Parents with a migration background feel powerless and alone in the face of the problem. Thus, the well-being of parents determines the probability of children being dragged into crime (VanderPyl, 2018). Mothers participating in the study often state being blamed for not taking care of their children and being left alone. Radohl emphasizes supporting and helping parents (Radohl, 2011). Other studies also highlight the importance of family welfare in preventing delinquency (Abdulgaziev et al., 2018; Arokiaraj et al., 2011; Razgale & Riga Stradins, 2010). The stigma theory in juvenile delinquency deals with the effects of labels or stigmas on juvenile behavior. However, this study discusses parents of delinquent children.

The stigma experienced by the parent affects their well-being, making it difficult to cope with the problem. Stigmatized parents have difficulty controlling their anger (Meldrum et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2022). Parents in the study also had difficulties in anger control during the interviews. The parents generally lived separately, observing that living separately had a negative impact on the child. It can lead to being stigmatized as “bad mother” and “bad father.” Single parents evaluated themselves as socially and economically inadequate in general. They emphasized the importance of closeness, respect, and love between parents to prevent the delinquency of children. Other studies support this situation (Jin et al., 2019). The findings reveal the need for an effective and correct social work practice to eliminate parents' grievances due to their children's situations.

Correct social work intervention should evaluate the individual in their environment and organize interventions effectively in this direction. Preventing the problem before it occurs reduces the damage it will cause on the individual. More studies are needed on preventive measures in this regard. Further exploratory studies are needed to develop educational, rehabilitative, and therapeutic interventions as well as preventive measures.

4. CONCLUSION

The parents in this study experience the social, psychological, and economic effects of having a delinquent child. These parents, who cannot find support for the disadvantages they experience, experience intense stigma. It is understood that the attention that should be given to the family and the child has been replaced by prejudices, discrimination, and social exclusion. Parents are not taken into account in this negative experience of the family. Parents and children experience this problem as a result of many intersecting inequalities. Parents participating in the study emphasize the importance of being understood and receiving social support. They want to be taken seriously so they can organize their lives and get on with it. Parents especially need social work interventions and suggestions for their needs. For instance, those families might require supportive family therapy, child therapy, addiction treatment, or social work counseling. Besides, they may need emergency aid and support services for urgent needs. These families may also be provided support, including opportunities for education and employment, financial aid, or alternative activities for their offspring.

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