PARENTING AND SOCIAL ROLES IN TURKISH TRADITIONAL FAMILIES: ISSUES AND CHOICES IN PARENTING FOR TURKISH EXPATRIATE FAMILIES LIVING IN BUCHAREST

Ahmet ECIRLI[1]

Abstract: *This article looks into the issues and challenges of parenting in Turkish families upholding traditional values that live in Bucharest, the capital of Romania. Based on theoretical mainstreams on parenting and the structure of Turkish families, a qualitative research was designed with two aims. The first was to describe the issues and choices in parenting for Turkish expatriate families living in a foreign country. The second was to find out to which of the three ideal-types of families according to Baumrind (permissive, authoritarian, authoritative) do they fit closest. According to the main findings, these Turkish expatriate families show traits somewhere between Baumrind's authoritative and authoritarian types of family. The parents' own values are taken as reference. However, the child's obedience is not an end in itself, using realistic restrictions and giving importance to reasoning for the policies they apply concerning the child's development. Within the family, the father has a dominant position, in charge with securing the economic resources, while the wife main roles are household management and child rearing.*

Keywords: *Parenting, family, child rearing, Turkish traditional family, roles in the family, motherhood*

[1] Ph.D. in Sociology, Lecturer, Department of Political Science and International Relations Epoka University, Tirane; Lecturer, Dean of Faculty of Philology and Educational Sciences, University of Beder,Tirane, Email: aecirli@beder.edu.al

1. Introduction

In the past 20 years, increasing economic and political ties between Romania and Turkey meant not just a steady expansion in the flow of goods, services and capital, but also in the formation of a community of Turkish citizens living in Romania for business, work or study. This article looks into the issues and challenges of parenting in expatriate Turkish families upholding traditional values. Based on theoretical mainstreams on parenting and the structure of Turkish families, a qualitative research was designed to describe the issues facing Turkish families living in Bucharest.

2. Parenting as a social process

Parents are considered as the first educators of children. Akkok (1999) underlines the importance of family for socialization as primary agents, which influence the child both indirectly and directly. Thus, a partnership between teachers and parents is seen as a necessity for an effective process of learning.

Baumrind (1971) introduced a classification of parents into three groups according to their choices of control mechanisms over the children:

1. Parents in the "Permissive" category allocate a resource to children and give them responsibility to modify, regulate or shape their behaviour as much as possible.

2. Parents in "Authoritarian" category take their own values as reference, give importance to obedience as most important, and exert extended precautions if their children behave in conflict to such values.

3. Parents in "Authoritative" category try to control the activities of their children without considering the obedience as a priority. They use realistic restrictions and give importance to reasoning for the policies they apply for the sake of child's own development.

According to Davies (2000, p. 245), parenting "is the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood. Parenting refers to the activity of raising a child rather than the biological relationship." The choices made during this process by the parents, especially on autonomy and warmth have long-lasting effects in enhancing the confidence and identity development during puberty and adolescence (Kamptner, 1988).

Involving parents into educational programs significantly increases their parenting skills and leads to eliminate problems in many areas such as unusual expectations from the child, lack of understanding of the child's requirements, parent-child relationship, methodology of family education for the child, meeting child's emotional,

social and physical needs. Croake & Glover (1977) view parenting education as the learning activity in which parents intend to change their methodology of interaction with the child for gaining more affirmative behaviour. They regarded the mother's education as a very important factor and almost equivalent term to parent education. Bogenschneider et al. (1997) studied the relationship between parents' educational methods and the development of their offspring. The findings revealed that parents qualified in child education promote security and success while unqualified parents cause problematic behaviour. A Mother-Child education program (Bekman 1998) could reduce social and economic related problems of the children at school age. Overall, parent education helps families to improve their own importance, talents and skills (Aral *et al.* 2011).

Working outside limits women in terms of child caring and as a result reduces the time allocated for child's home education (İsvan & Nīlüfer, 1991). A correct and useful expectation for child's behaviour is the main dynamic contributing child's home education (Stevens (1984). According to Carter and Welch (1981) the child's behaviour, age and experience of parents are important factors affecting home education of the child. He views parenting experience as a reason for adults to develop a more *authoritarian style* concerning the child's education. They become more sensible to the social needs of the child as well.

Family environment, where the parents are the first teachers, offers richer possibilities than any other learning medium. While the school fulfils the educational task, family life provides a setting where the child spends the majority of the time and shares experiences of basic interaction with the social world. Gursimsek *et al. (*2007)

Choices over discipline and responsibility

According to a study carried out by Krishnakumar & Buehler (2000) parental acceptance and harsh *discipline* are the main causes to impact inter-parental conflict. The way children cooperate with their parents depends on the parents' attitudes such as being supportive, motivating, being open to discussion rather than severe discipline. Morris et al. (2002) suggest that methods of discipline have different effects on different children. While one method appears to be useful on certain child, the same method may not be effective on another child. In the views of Amato, P. R. & Fowler F., (2002) avoidance of severe punishment will result in positive outcomes for the child such as higher educational success, less discipline problems, better personality development and self-confidence. Other than unsuccessful anger management, problems with disciplinary methods stem from the fact that parents have lack of knowledge of other than physical punishment. They just imitate their

parents using the same methods as they experienced through their childhood. Parents' usage of appropriate disciplinary techniques depends on the compliance level of child's behaviour. They tend to show inappropriate parenting attitudes towards child contradictory behaviours.

The *responsibility* between parents in family education of the child should be carefully shared each knowing clearly the basic roles. Bolak (1997) attributed responsibility of husband in the evaluation of woman in terms of *his role in the household*. He states that conflict arises if the *man is dominant both on domestic and economic grounds (*Bolak, 1997, p.409)*.

Parenting and social roles in Turkish traditional families: theory background

Ute (2001) views Turkish patriarchal traditionalistic families as *parent dominant* where the father is dominant over the mother and the children especially in the areas where financial issues are concerned. In such families, the mother's role covers household management and child rearing. Children in the family have no authority, but they can gain authority with increasing age and contribution to the family's budget.

Turkish family traditions are formed mainly by religious values where children are seen as sources of joy happiness and as a gift of God for both parents and elders members. Family values are based on close ties of members, faithfulness, responsibility and authenticity while individuality, self-interest and egoism are marginalized.

A study by Filiz & Yaprak (2009) reveals how parenting style affects children's view towards their parents. Their research was conducted in an Anatolian city of Eskisehir. The parents involved were categorized as authoritarian, democratic, protective and neglectful. The findings suggest that the democratic style was the most frequent parenting style while the least was the authoritarian one.

Kircaali-Iftar G. (2005) researched a group of 50 mothers with 4 to 6-year-old preschool children in Eskisehir (Turkey), looking into terms of disciplinary methods practiced to overcome behaviour problems with their children. Mothers prefer mostly (N=37) using verbal explanations while using (N=3) negative reinforcement least as disciplinary means to cope with behavioural problems of their children. Punishment (N=18), physical punishment (N=10), shouting (N=5), redirecting attention (N=5), threatening (N=4), ignoring (N=4) were used by the mothers as well.

The result of a study by Cakir S. G. & Aydin G. (2005) investigating the differences of middle adolescents in terms the relationship of their identity formation with familial variables, showed that authoritative parents' children are more reliable those of

neglectful parents in terms of identity foreclosure. Additionally female students value identity status while male students regard identity foreclosure as more important.

Providing for the youngsters' psychological and social necessities for a long time by parents and is viewed as normal in Turkish culture (Gulerce, 1996). In many regions of Anatolia, the children's *obedience* to parents is regarded as a basic trait. Usually girls are considered more obedient than boys. Acceptance of early adolescent marriage among girls could be attributed to their culture of "obedience" to the parents. Grown up children may stay with the nuclear family until they get married. Married adult children may stay until they find opportunities of having a regular income to maintain the needs of their own family. This leads an extended family in the form in which the parents are the supporters of the newly formed nuclear family. Usually their presence ends within the first ten years. The bride serves for the requirements of the household. The married adult offspring helps the parents either by assisting his father's work or in the family business as a participant supporter.

Sabanci (2009) studied the ways of partnerships between parents and schools for better education of children. His findings suggest that parental involvement in educational programs significantly increased with the support of Ministry of National Education. An innovative approach is required to include mainly female parents in parent education as they play a vital role in child's education.

According to a study by Tay & Yildirim (2009), the list of values having priority for Turkish parents for their children to be taught at early ages include: "success, socialization, democratization, self-improvement of the children", "peace". Parents regard the school as responsible for teaching the values of "patriotism," "honesty," "attaching importance to family unity", "responsibility," and "hardworking". The actual values given priority by Turkish Ministry of Education (Tay & Yildirim, 2009, p.1535, citing [MEB], 2005) are as follows:

> "Fairness, family unity, freedom, peace, being scientific, hardworking, solidarity, consciousness, honesty, aesthetics, tolerance, hospitality, freedom, health, love, respect, responsibility, cleanliness, patriotism, helpfulness".

The willingness of parents for "patriotism" to be taught is attributed to "heroic deeds" in Turkish history (Tay & Yildirim, 2009).

Expatriate families have similarities and differences in terms traditional values with the ones in home country as they are in interaction with a host society where there is interchange of values of a different culture. Post-communist Romanian society has made some significant changes in the family: increasing age at first marriage, high divorce rate, lower average duration of marriages etc. (Nicolăescu V., 2010). However, moral traditionalism by preserving the family unit continue currently in Romanian society (Udvuleanu M.C., 2011, p. 43) and the family demonstrates a

strong influence on the lives of Romanians (Croitoru A., 2011, p 4). In this context, it could be important to underline that parenting education is one of the strategies that contribute to the strengthening of the support provided to families (Cojocaru D., 2011, p. 152.). Despite the recognition of the problem, the lack of a nation-wide or a local system for funding such programmes, especially considering the lack of a coherent system of parent education services, results in a vulnerability and volatility of such social services (Cojocaru D. , Cojocaru Ş., Ciuchi O.M., 2011, p. 155).

Objective of the study

The objectives of this study are as follows.

a) To find out the issues and choices in parenting for Turkish expatriate families living in Bucharest, the capital of Romania;

b) To find out to which of the three ideal-types of families according to Baumrind do they fit closest.

Methodology

A qualitative research was designed featuring semi structured interviews with 30 traditional families of Turkish expatriates living in Bucharest, the capital of Romania. The selection of the families for the interviews followed the well-informed informant method from anthropology. Turkish community organizations were contacted with the request to provide contact details for families living in Bucharest. Relatives were avoided to eliminate narrowing the variety within the group.

An overview of the interviewed families is shown in the following table.

Table 1
*Types of families and the members for the interview
in Bucharest*

Type of family	Total number	Total number of family members interviewed (male / female)
Extended families	9	27 (14/13)
Nuclear families	16	32 (16/16)
Single parent families	5	5 (1/4)
Total	30	64 (31/33)

The study was limited only to Turkish families living in Bucharest. According to officials from community organisations, this is the place of residence for most of the Turkish citizens that are in Romania for business, work or study. Further research in different regions in Romania would be desirable.

64 interviews were conducted during the spring of 2011, all of them being recorded and then transcribed. The interview guide was semi-structured and designed to cover the following topics: (1) the basic methods for child education, (2) personal experiences about the growing up a child within the family, (3) perceptions regarding the relationship with the child, (4) expectations and concerns regarding the children in the future.

Findings and Interpretations

Socialization was viewed as one of the main problem among the interviewed families. They complain about lack of interaction with other Turkish families so that they and especially their children could socialize better. Families usually take part in the common public traditional activities organised by Turkish community organisations. The events, festivals, public dinners, pudding day, kermes and "bayram" are main annual activities that all Turkish families can participate with all their family members.

The "one-child" family was perceived as having peculiar issues among some parents. It is difficult for the "only child" to complete a natural process of socialization due to the absence of siblings. Although such a child may find opportunities to socialize with other children in nursery and kindergarten at a certain age, such socialization could not be compared to that of with his/her brothers/sisters in the same environment. Because the latter is not just a pure socialization, it is rather a sensational one. Having more than one child offers advantage for Turkish parents providing a medium to raise normally socialized children. "I wish I had another one at least to be a playing partner for my only child" says a mother (29) of 3 year old girl.

Another finding as a results of the interview is the fact that *upcoming new sibling may give rise to the child's fear of having to share the mother.* Being restless, expressing extreme anger, aggressive behaviours, thumb sucking are some of the signs that the child may show just to attract more attention. The guest's behaviours play an important role in this case. They should avoid statements like "you are a grown up now, your baby brother/sister is lovely". Children should not be compared with each other. A child's belongings should not be used for the smaller one without permission, and his/her decision should be respected. Attitudes involving extreme worries about the baby should be avoided.

A major concern of the interviewed families was *the protection of their children from possible abuse* either home or out-home environment. Allowing the child to interact with teens addicted to harmful habits such as drinking alcohol, using drugs, small scale gambling etc. The boundaries to other people, even relatives, should be carefully defined and taught to the child. All forms of abuse lead to severe damage not only physical but also long-term psychosocial development in various ways. Sexual abuse is perceived as the most severe one. It is worrisome that child victims are subject to sexual abuse at an early age by the known persons in the family, the street or school environment. Parents are conscious of the situation and have the knowledge and the skills acquired from their parents. They transfer the ways and skills of protection from abuse to the next generation on a step-by–step basis. Most of the interviewed families expressed their worries about protecting their children from possible out-of-home abuse. Children under age of 15 are not allowed alone to go with public transport. Groups of teens could enjoy the playgrounds in neighbourhood city parks.

The wife-husband interaction becomes more important especially in the presence of their children. The child's attitude towards the parents' behaviour could be considered as observation in which father and mother are examples to be taken. Their reactions to certain events do not have only situational meanings; their behaviours are messages to the child, to do the same in his/her life. A mother (38) of 2 children says: "We should set first examples to the children in terms of behaviour. The reaction to an event is not just a simple reaction. It is also the same as telling the child -you should behave the same way I did if you confront a situation like this".

The shared activities such as having a reading time, watching a movie or a cartoon, playing a game with at least one the parents contribute a better child-parent relationship. A mother (45) of three school-aged children says:

> "We have some reading time with their favourite cookies which I cook for them before they go to school. We have another reading session after they come from the school. We have another time session of watching cartoons together. Before they go to bed, I tell the stories about great person's lives. We analyse those persons' behaviours together talking about where they did mistakes or good deeds. This way they learned how to analyse and express their own ideas".

One of the principles that parents expressed most is the fact that parents should *practice the things they want their child do*. A couple expresses their ways of educating their two children:

> "We applied the things that we wanted them to do. We practiced the in a way that they see us, such as reading, having good dialogs, smiling at each other, asking how the other one is doing etc. Children observed us and imitated us.

We believe that they already got reading habits, being example to them is more effective than just telling or insisting them to read". The couple prohibits nothing to their children. Instead, they do observe them. They pay special attention to the friends of their children by inviting them home from time to time to know them better. They say they know how to overcome problems that may appear.

It is worth stating here the *four pieces of advice* a father (53) gave his children.

1) Feel alone in life and do the struggle as if no one is helping, and overcome all the difficulties in life. 2) Be devoted and patient in life, always give to others but do not ask from them anything 3) If you want luxury, know that you find it in struggle 4) Eat for living, do not live for eating.

A 62-year-old retired teacher, father of 3 children, views the importance of *family values as a guarantee of national unity and solidarity.* According to him, a strong family is necessary for a stable society and educated parents are necessary for stable families. In his own words:

"Throughout history our society continued its growth and has managed to protect cultural identity by emphasising the family values. The family is one of the most important institutions for transferring national values to next generations."

Many families considered *obstinate behaviour of the child* as one of their major problems in their home-education. Obstinate behaviour may occur at any age and in every human being. Children between 2-4 years are particularly obstinate. At this age, children become aware of their existence and their independence is now put forward, they want to do their own things. They may enter a period obstinacy in which they refuse things or activities even if they like them. This situation could be attributed to the child's intention to self-prove which may lead to a confrontation with the parents if they do not pay attention to the child's situation. While being a natural step in child's development, due to misinterpretation, it leads to a conflict between parent and child. Obstinate behaviours become more severe if parents at this period make a habit of saying "no" to child as the child imitates the parents, he/she may develop of having the same habit.

A mother (52 year old) states that *avoiding quarrels between the adults in the family*, especially towards the observation of children, is very essential for child rearing. The period in which child is more obstinate does not mean that everything offered by the child will be accepted. A mother (28) of a 4-year-old boy says that "During an obstinate behaviour by my 4 year old son, I think of the solution for the severity, duration and an appropriate method of solving the problem causing the crisis. The best method is to deal out the child's attention. This may be a cartoon, a bird, a cat, a

favourite food or play, etc. can be anything. For example, if the child wants to do things forbidden, I gently remind him then I suggest an alternative. Some parents say 'no' to something, then they say 'yes', to the same event. In this case child becomes obstinate until his request is done."

When necessary, *the punishment is given by only one of the parents*. In such a case while the child becomes temporarily away from the one giving the punishment he/she could find chance to the other parent to have a little support and advice. The difference between the wrong behaviour from the person of the child must be made clear. The mistakes are to be punished, not the personalities. "Our punishment is the deprivation from positive sanctions," says a father (48) of 3 children at school age.

Many young mothers perceive *transition to motherhood as a path to a new status*, as she contributes to the next generation by bringing up a new life. In this sense, motherhood affects women's self-esteem and self-confidence. Her ties with her husband, with the neighbourhood and the community are strengthened. Thus, motherhood may result in a great enthusiasm as the time dedicated to the children in the expense of mother's work and the pleasure is not seen as a waste. Motherhood needs physiological, psychosocial and mental maturity. It is the beginning of mature womanhood and it adds a new dimension to the female identity. According to a 28–year-old mother of an 11 month baby, "I enjoy a lot the breastfeeding. Between the baby and me, it is like an emotional contact rather than physical one. I believe she feels that too".

The role of the father in the family was expressed by most of the mothers. They saw father's existence and role in the family as extremely important. Maternal and paternal roles for the child's education are seen as complementing and supporting each other, while being necessary for the child's upbringing. Children need father as well as mother for their healthy personality development.

The father is a very important prominent figure for both girls and boys in the family. His absence is perceived as possibly leading to a lack of gender development as boys take the mother as role model leading him to feminine behaviour. Absence of father for girls who get acquaintance of masculine characters may cause insufficiencies in their further relationship during marriage. Sharing daily life elements, being involved in the routines, expressing responsibilities, caring about the education and the time spent together strengthen the relationship between father and child.

Some parents underlined the importance of *avoiding inconsistent rules* in child's discipline. A negative attitude towards the child may result in the same kind of reaction. The rules should be valid, necessary and consistent. A mother (37) of a 5-year-old girl says:

"I put rules short and rationale, always avoid bringing up unnecessary prohibitions, otherwise I begin to say "no" which can cause my child having the feeling that whatever she does is wrong." "We try to avoid using negative expressions. There is always a way of explaining things in a positive way."

Most of the parents expressed their need of support in child education. Married couples make a big change in their lives having a child. Values, priorities, roles, relationship with the environment change. During this period, parents need support in many ways. The interaction between child and parents determines the position of child in the family. The first social experience of the child comes from the family environment. In this regard, a conscious approach of the parents plays a vital role in child's social development. Education of mother is very important in educating the child. Because in traditional Turkish families mother is the one who allocates more time for educating the child. According to the results of the interview most of the parents express the importance of the period of 0 to 3 years of age where child's physical and psychological needs of the most intense and dependent to the mother. Another important period is expressed as 0 to 6 years in childhood. The mother - child relationship is of primary importance at this stage. The child's ability of basic behaviour of public life such as eating, sleeping, hygienic habits is determined by attitudes of adults. The child finds more *examples* in extended traditional families.

Role of mother-in-law for newly married couples is considered as supportive. Among traditional Turkish families mother-in-law plays a vital role. She is viewed as a source that can transmit all accumulated experience of traditional values to a new married couple. Especially the young and "inexperienced" bride is seen to be in need of well preparation for the life with many difficulties.

In extended traditional Turkish families, especially in rural areas, newly married couples stay several years (sometimes up to ten years or more) within the same households. The traditional values are transmitted during this period with a main contribution of mother-in-law. She takes the role of a trainer or a teacher for the new bride expressing her responsibilities to take care of the newly formed marriage. Some possible conflicts may arise because of such a relationship. Yet it has some advantages especially when the marriage takes place at early age, which is still widely the case in many Anatolian villages. The guidance, especially by the parents is needed as a support for the newly formed *attached family*.

While the bride is protected by the father against the possible violent behaviour of an inexperienced young husband, the mother teaches her how to take care of household daily routines and how to raise children. Mothers need psychological support especially during the pregnancy when they have the feelings of fear, insecurities or instabilities. At this time, an experienced mother such as mother-in-law can be helpful.

The interviewed parents have expressed that they learn parenting along with rising up their children. It is commonly thought that it is the child who needs to learn from the parents. Yet the role of children leading their parents to learn most of the necessary knowledge about *parenting* is undeniable.

More than half of the interviewee expressed that adult's behaviours are subjected to change towards their environment after having children. They suggest that after having children adults become more compassionate, understand the value of their own parents, develop a better social responsibility and become emotionally more sensitive. "After having my first child I started being more compassionate to children of others," says a father (33) with a 2 ½-year old baby boy.

Conclusions

The family ranks high in the value system of Turkish expatriate families living in Romania in a similar manner to most of the Turkish population back home. Thus, the family is seen to guarantee national unity and solidarity.

Where would Turkish families fit into Baumrind's classification of families into three ideal-types: permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative? First, let us review how parents regard the parenting role. The interviewed parents have expressed that they learn parenting along with rising up their children. Parents tend to see themselves as first teachers and home as first school for their children. They acknowledge that the child is always a very good observer, and therefore should practice in their own life what they offer to children as good behaviours. In practice, this is more difficult of course, and the parents admit to needing support as well. Overall, the roles within the family point to a more traditional type of family. Motherhood is valued, perceived as a major step in maturity is and, perhaps most significant, conferring a new social status for the mother. The family environment could assume the setting of a childcare centre with the mother not seeking a job and assuming a homemaker role. To this end, the extended family remains a model, with the presence of mother-in-law in the household is viewed as especially supportive for newly married couples.

The practices and views on discipline and punishment regarding the child's behaviour are perhaps the most significant. Punishment is viewed as desirable be in the form of deprivation from positive sanctions, but both parents should not be involved in the punishment of the child at the same time. With the child being at a critical moment in personality development, the accusations should not be done in public; it should be done in private for their personalities should not be hurt. The mistakes or improper are to be punished or criticized, not the person of the child. Moreover, parents point to Explanation of correct and wrong behaviours in an appropriate way, avoiding inconsistent rules and negative statements. Obstinate

children are perceived as a special case, requiring more attention. Nevertheless, one counter-intuitive fact should be noted: arguing with the child affects the parents most.

Ute's contention of Turkish traditionalistic families, whether residing in Turkey or in Germany, with the father is dominant as the *dominant figure* seems to hold in Romania as well. However, this should be qualified as needing further empirical research for the whole of Romania, not just Bucharest, and would only be the case for Turkish men that have brought their entire families with them. While in addition to being the breadwinner, the father assumes a role of strengthening the family environment. This entails a range of activities, including eating together, at least once a day, trying to spend a cheerful meal, retelling each other how each spent the day to the allotting quality time spend with the children. The quality time could, for instance, involve having reading times with the children, which is very useful for parent-child interaction as well as child home-education. Overall, children should have right to announce their ideas on these activities. The father's status in the family is enhanced when the love and the attention towards children are expressed explicitly.

There are some parenting issue specific with rearing the children in a different culture. The Turkish community in Romania is not as large as in Germany relative to the overall population. Therefore, socialization is considered as one of the main problems among the interviewed families because of lack of contact with a critical number of other Turkish families. A one child family is viewed as increasing this problem.

Overall, Turkish families residing in Bucharest, Romania, show traits somewhere between Baumrind's authoritative and authoritarian types of family. The parents' own values are taken as reference. Precautions are taken for the children to behave according to such values. However, the child's obedience is not an end in itself, using realistic restrictions and giving importance to reasoning for the policies they apply concerning the child's development.

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