



Surviving Suicide: Emotional Reconstruction of the Bereaved

Fatma Zehra Fidan^{*}

Abstract

Objectives: Suicide is a stigmatized and marginalized act by society that damages the lives of those close to the suicidal person and makes rebuilding their lives difficult. In understanding the social reality after suicide, emotions that are components of social action play a key role. This study's main aim is to understand the emotions of those close to the suicidal person and the cultural roots of these emotions.

Materials and Methods: To obtain the necessary data, in-depth interviews were conducted with 23 individuals who were close to someone who had committed suicide, and the data were analyzed using discourse analysis.

Results: The following results were obtained: Anger was the most prominent emotion in those close to the suicidal person. This anger was directed toward actors who were indifferent to the problems that led to suicide and toward the individual who committed suicide. Those close to the suicidal person were in a state of anger, shame, fear, guilt, and fear of being blamed due to social stigma and marginalization. The most significant feature of those close to the deceased is the emotional disturbances resulting from the coexistence of opposing emotions.

Conclusions: Making periodic programs for the treatment of relatives of people who committed suicide and spreading a functional education program to all stages of education to raise individuals sensitive to human rights are among the urgent measures that the state of social law can take.

Keywords: Emotion, Stigma, Suicide, Suicide bereavement, Discourse analysis

Introduction

Throughout human history, suicide has been marginalized and stigmatized, leading to a difficult life and intense emotional disturbances for those who are left behind. Understanding the cultural origins of suicide perception is important for correctly interpreting the social reality following the suicide. This study focuses on the emotions of those left behind and the cultural construction of these emotions origins.

One of the pieces of evidence of death being a sociological phenomenon (1) is the situation of those left behind after a suicide. The historical and cultural approach to suicide is marginalizing and stigmatizing (2,3). The stigma surrounding the lives of those left behind is a social label of abnormality; in the dominant paradigm, anything abnormal is condemned and stigmatized as bad. Stigma, the scar, stigma, shame, and humiliation that marks a person (4) and exposure to it (5), surrounding the lives of those left behind, is a social label of abnormality. In the dominant paradigm, anything abnormal is condemned and stigmatized as bad. Although abnormality changes parallel to social change (4), the labeling and stigmatization orientation in social habitus does not change when it comes to suicide, due to the influence of philosophy and theology. Aristotle (6) and Spinoza (7) exclude the existence of our body, unlike

the human mind, and exclude the dead person from the “intelligent person” framework. Suicide is prohibited in Judaism, Christianity (8), and Islam (9). This is because suicide leaves unanswered questions and unresolvable doubts for the people who are left behind.

It is important to define the concept before focusing on the feelings of those left behind (10,11). Although the concept of “those left behind” has not yet been fully defined, the degree of closeness to the deceased, the level of emotional impact, and the continuity of this impact are important factors that determine those left behind (12). Surviving suicide does not mean surviving suicide; it means witnessing suicide and being exposed to the effects of the event (13). In this context, for those left behind, suicide is a tragedy they must overcome. This and making reconstruction of their lives extremely difficult (2,12,13). Many of the people who are left behind are reluctant to seek help despite experiencing a variety of emotional disturbances after their loved one's suicide and needing professional assistance (12,14). People who reach to professional help can recover mentally and gain strength in managing the process (3,12,15-19). According to the existing literature, there is a connection between the disclosure of stigmatized identity and mental health (3,20-23); however, due to the lack of research on the subject, data on the nature of this connection are insufficient.



Key Messages

- ▶ The emotional states and related action tendencies of the relatives of people who committed suicide, which constitute a significant portion of the world's population, are alarming for communities worldwide. Creating a healthier and more prosperous society for survivors is one of the fundamental tasks of the social state of law.

The psychological confusion that the relatives of the deceased, who are stigmatized due to their closeness to the deceased, fall into is manifested in different aspects of daily life. One of the most obvious situations where this confusion is observed is mourning. Mourning for the deceased is a common emotion in world cultures (24). The fact that mourning is linked not only to the psychological state of those left behind but also to sociological realities, means that how mourning is experienced can vary (2,15,25,26). Mourning, as a means of socialization in which high-level social solidarity is experienced alongside individual expressions of grief (23), differs when suicide is involved. During the mourning following suicide, the pain of the manner of death and the anxiety of stigmatization have come to the fore rather than the pain of death (2). Suicide considered abnormal in the history of humanity is a sharp experience in which those left behind feel stigmatized, and the deceased is the one who cannot be mourned.

Cultural Construction of Emotions

We focus on the bereaved relatives' emotions to understand the background of this complex picture that emerges after suicide. Since understanding emotions allows us to see how the social actor relates to the deceased and the cultural influence on their emotions after suicide. This influence determines actions and the construction of daily life (27,28). In this study, a social constructionist approach (29) will be adopted, arguing that the emotions of the individual who both adapts to society and creates it are formed in this sociological orbit, rather than discussing how emotions are formed.

Emotions, which determine the value of the object we perceive according to us (30), strengthen the individual in terms of willingness to act (31). Whether we like or dislike objects does not depend on whether they are good or bad, but on the harm or benefit they provide us (32), and each time we perceive this harm or benefit, a sphere of emotion emerges (30). This sphere of emotions is evaluated by thoughts and transferred to people who do not experience similar situations. Thus emotions and orientations toward objects are socially constructed (33). Emotions, which are kneaded and actualized in daily life, are constructed by the culture that we are born into and made suitable for the social order (34).

The ability of human beings to live in security depends on their behavior in compliance with socially accepted

beliefs, taboos, totems, laws, and rules. When threatening elements appear in social life, certain emotions emerge (35). The state of pain and despair felt by the body and soul is grief, while its opposite is joy (7). Fear, which is an unstable grief, arises from the image of a suspicious event. Human beings' general insecurity and powerlessness in the face of power trigger fear. When this situation is lifted, hope turns into trust and fear transforms into joy (35). Another emotion that brings pain and sorrow to human life is shame. When one's spiritual sphere is intervened in, there is a danger of a diminution in the value of one's personality; shame arises in these situations where one feels a diminished sense of honor and dignity (35). Shame is related to how one is viewed by others and triggers the desire to hide. The more intense the shame, the more intense the desire to hide (33). One of the most important emotion anger that determine human behavior symbolizes the human tendency to be strong and the ambition for domination. This psychological expression aims to destroy every obstacle that the enraged person encounters (35).

Materials and Methods

Participants

Twenty-three semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted for the study, 19 women and four men. Although the sample was not based on female participants, one of the most important limitations of the research was that male participants avoided talking about the subject. Three participants were 50–62 years old, 17 were 30–50, three were 19 years old, twelve had higher education and were employed, three were students, and eight were primary education graduates and homemakers. In addition, seven of them were single, two were divorced, and the others were married. Two of our participants were teachers, and after the suicides they witnessed in the villages where they worked, they discussed their observations about the suicide victims (students or parents of students) and their relatives and provided information about four suicide cases. There was one case that did not fit the general characteristics of the participants, where the deceased was schizophrenic and committed suicide after killing their parents. The cousin of the deceased was interviewed in the study. The range of participants in the study extended from first-degree relatives (mother, child, sibling, grandchild) to cousins, aunts, sisters-in-law, and close friends.

Interviews

Two interviews were conducted with all participants at different times. In the pre-interview before the recorded interview, the participant was informed about the research. The pre-interviews lasted an average of 15 minutes. The researcher, an expert in qualitative research, prepared a semi-structured interview script (36), including open-ended questions. The researcher conducted the interviews, and expert opinions were obtained on

participant sensitivities. The following themes and related questions were included in the interview text: 1- What were the participant's feelings and thoughts during and after witnessing the incident? 2- What were the factors affecting the participant's feelings and thoughts?

The interviews were conducted via Zoom meeting with participants living outside of Izmir, Turkey, and face-to-face with those living in Izmir, and lasted an average of 1 hour. The researcher then transcribed the recorded interviews. The data obtained were meticulously analyzed, and descriptive repertoires were obtained. These repertoires were grouped according to the themes they contained and analyzed using the discourse analysis method. The following repertoires emerged in the study: 1- the most prominent emotion in the relatives of the deceased is anger; 2- suicide is an act that brings shame to those left behind; 3- suicide frightens those left behind because it makes others want to commit suicide; 4- a feeling of guilt is inevitable for the relatives of the deceased.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher could not obtain an Ethics Committee Report for the study due to their dismissal from the university for political reasons in 2016. The researcher was the only one who listened to the interview recordings and kept the transcripts in a secure database. All details that could potentially be used to identify participants have been changed.

Methods

Our main criterion in sampling selection is that the participant is a relative of a person who committed suicide. Being a relative includes close relatives, as well as friends, neighbors, and acquaintances who are significantly affected by the suicide. The importance of gender, age, education, and cultural differences in sample diversity cannot be denied. However, when it comes to suicide, it is not possible to create a sample with the diversity that the researcher planned. For this reason, the sample consisted of people who volunteered to talk about suicide, and this group was classified within itself.

In-depth interviews, a qualitative research technique, were used in this study, focusing on the feelings of the relatives of the deceased. In-depth interviewing, in which data are collected directly from the participants, is a technique that allows the discovery of what a person knows and thinks about an event and what experiences they have had about that event. In this respect, it is "more than questions and answers" (37). This method, in which "information is described as a buried metal and the interviewer as a miner who unearths this precious metal" (36), provides an opportunity to understand the real thoughts and feelings of the participant (38). In-depth interviewing also offers the opportunity to understand why the perpetrators of the most complex events behave the way they do and the grounds for reconciliation behind

these events. The researcher gently guides the participant using thoughtful and well-prepared questions in an extended discussion, listening to the participant with an active and reflective focus (39). In the interview setting the researcher creates, the participant develops a considerable rapport with the researcher and is empowered by this unusual process of being listened to. Such an interview provides the participant with the opportunity—often for the first time—to analyze the motivations for the action under investigation (40). Although the biggest difficulty of the study was reaching the relatives of the person who committed suicide, the study reached a certain level of data saturation (41) with 23 participants. Considering the generalizability limitations inherent in qualitative research, it can be said that the results we have reached are significantly generalizable and transferable to similar contexts and populations. However, it is clear that there is a need for more comprehensive research on this subject.

Discourse Analysis as a Method

Our emotions and thoughts reveal themselves through what we do and say (42). "Speech is the act of self-transcendence in the direction of the reference of language as a signifier and what it confronts. Discourse is a series of preferences in which certain meanings are selectively taken in, and others are left out" (43), which produces ways of talking about the world and social practices. The discourses that are the basis for what we speak also define the type of person who speaks (44).

Explanatory repertoires, subject positions, and ideological dilemmas constitute the analytical foci of discourse analysis (45,46). Explanatory repertoires are themes constructed by the same people in the speech text and repeated across texts (47). Subject positions are revealed by identifying the person who constructs explanatory repertoires (45). Conversations with ambivalent and contradictory statements indicate ideological dilemmas (48).

Discourse Analysis

1. The most prominent emotion among the relatives of the deceased was anger

Anger was the main emotion experienced in different versions by all participants in the study. Anger objects are self-destructive and suicidal actors who do not take preventive measures.

1-1. The anger directed at the deceased

Choosing death, regardless of the cause, evokes feelings of intense anger in the deceased's relatives.

1-1-a. The deceased is the one who buries his family in the grave

According to Esen, the deceased is the person who decides to die not only for themselves but also for their family members.

“I used to go and kick the grave. I was shouting and calling... Out of anger. ‘You will not be here, get up!’ I was trying to wake her up. They took me to the doctor; they thought I lost my mind. However, every time I go to the grave, I say there is not one person in that grave; there are four people... There is a piece of four people in that grave.” (Esen).

Expressions in which the deceased is directed at the object of anger mark the trauma experienced through a complex set of emotions. Love and longing are left behind by anger, resentment, and helplessness. The social actor, who expresses the intense feelings for the sister with the first person singular pronoun, defines the picture behind the suicide in a familial framework (*there is not one person in that grave; there are four people...*). The participant’s statements depicted family members as half-dead and positioned on a route between life and death (*there are pieces of four people in that grave*). The subject position is constructed as *the person who commits suicide and buries other family members in the grave*, and the opposite subject position is occupied by *the family members who are condemned to a half-dead life by their loved ones*.

The void created by the deceased’s departure is at the root of the participant’s feelings.

“I did not say ‘Mom, buy me this’ until I was that age because I had someone I could go to before my mother. Or when I had something they never knew. Gül (the deceased) was the first one to know... I would not exaggerate if I said she was my second mom. I do not know; I used to sleep with her at night. I could not sleep without putting her feet on my feet. There is such a big gap at home. At home, in bed...” (Esen)

The deceased, who was a source of multifaceted emotional fulfillment in the social actor’s world, left behind an irreparable void with the decision to die. The void did not only occur in the participant’s personal life but also extended to the household and its members. The prominent emotions in the complex emotional spiral are anger and grief.

1-1-b. The deceased is the one who does not appreciate the family and wastes the efforts

A love story that does not align with social values has driven the heroine to suicide, while her family has been plunged into grief, disappointment, and anger.

“I said, ‘My child has no father... I do not make my children suffer. I will not eat; I will put something in her dowry.’ However, she is my daughter... She goes to my heart... When someone does something to you, that is not what you get in return... Look, her brother... The child sacrificed herself at the age of 31... He is very resentful, too; he is worse than me.” (Aysel)

In Aysel’s eyes, suicide also means that the sacrifices she has made for her children have become nothing. According to the participant, family life, which is built with intense deprivations, should be above everyone and everything.

In this approach, the extent of the mental health disorder and emotional conflict of the victim, who is known to be suicidal, loses its importance (*Because, I mean, it is not worth it for anything for anyone. No one is superior to one’s family... (repetition and strong emphasis)*). In the interview, we learned that other members of the family were in the same situation and the anger and resentment toward the deceased were constantly emphasized.

“I did not go to the hospital... I did not go to the morgue. I did not go. Her brother said, ‘Let’s go!’, I told him, ‘I’m offended’... I mean, how could she do that to me? When my son cried at work because she was his sister... ‘What are you crying for?’ I said, ‘She did something very good to you.’ I have a resentment; it was ripped, something happened. ...she broke all our wings... (repetition and strong emphasis) *The whole family...*” (Aysel).

The suicide decision of the deceased is perceived as betrayal and unappreciation. Although she took her own life, the coding of the suicide as ‘*the kid who killed the mother*’ is one of the signs of the emotional confusion of those left behind. The wing, which means flying freely, is unique to birds. The *broken wings* that Aysel attributes to family members indicate that family members have lost the possibility to live normally. The deceased is constructed in the subject position of *the person who condemns the family members to endless grief and resentment*, while the opposite subject position is occupied by *the family members who are betrayed and broken by their loved ones*. Anger, resentment, and grief are intertwined in the deceased’s relatives, and helplessness (*May God spare my enemies and give patience to the living. Not only one person dies, but also takes others with.*) became the complement of this cluster of emotions.

In the eyes of those left behind, there are different extensions of unappreciation and betrayal of the family.

“Out of anger... Of course, there was resentment at the time. How could she do this under such good conditions? I mean, there was nothing from the husband, no beating from the husband, not even a slap, no abuse, no insult from the husband, also at home. Everyone looks at her with envy... I don’t know. Shame, not being able to understand, resentment, not being able to ascribe to her, not being able to ascribe to the family, there are so many emotions here... I can’t think of malicious intentions because we cared for her more than necessary.” (Gamze)

Gamze, who tries to solve the difficulties in her personal life in line with her religious beliefs, blames her sister-in-law (her brother’s wife), whom she sees in a better situation than herself, for her suicidal tendency and constructs the deceased as a subject *who is not grateful for the blessings that she is in*. There is deep pain, resentment, and anger in the participant arising from different factors. Suicide is perceived as a betrayal of the family (*We cared for her more than we should have*), even though she was a beloved daughter-in-law in a wealthy family (*My brother does not allow interference on our behalf; he is a very financially*

well-off person who shows much love.) and cherished (*My mother adopted her as if she were her daughter.*). In the accusation generalized by the participant with the third person plural pronoun, the subject position of the bride, who is valued more than necessary even though she is not worthy, is contrasted with the subject position of the family, who is betrayed by the bride who is valued more than necessary.

The resentment here is inherent in sadness and concern for the children (One of the children saw the corpse of the mother, who committed suicide with a gunshot to her head in her bedroom) who have been irreparably hurt, and anger at the stigmatization of the family. The failure to understand the suicide of the deceased, who was undergoing psychiatric treatment and therefore hospitalized in a clinic for a month, may be related to the failure to fully perceive the deceased's state of health. The fact that the unhealthy state of mind of the deceased was not prioritized in the participant's feelings and thoughts seems to be related to the heavy emotional burden assumed after the suicide. The suicide of the daughter-in-law of a respected family calls the respectability of the family into question and stigmatization becomes inevitable. Being stigmatized by society is at the center of the shame that accompanies feelings of anger.

1-1-c. The deceased is the one who destroys the dignity of family members

The young man (30 years old), who grew up under the strict rules of his authoritarian father, committed suicide due to problems between his mother and his wife. The cousin of the deceased describes the emotional state of the parents as follows:

"My brother-in-law most probably never forgave it. I think he considered it a sign of weakness. Weakness... I think my brother-in-law always considered it as a weakness. Because he is a powerful, autocratic, and dominant character, imagine we could not cough in front of him when we were children. He was very authoritarian, and according to him, a man had to be very strong. My brother-in-law could not accept this; how could he show such weakness..." (Sine)

The deceased's father is a parent who is inflexible in his rules. The eldest son, who grows up under this pressure, is withdrawn and quiet (*My brother was a very withdrawn child.*). This attitude of the person who cannot interfere in the problem between his mother and his wife and chooses suicide out of a sense of desperation is absolute powerlessness for his father. The prestige and power gained in urban life are of indispensable importance for the father. The suicide that undermines this power and dignity (*It was very embarrassing for him to expose his powerlessness, and it made people talk about him... They were very disturbed by this.*) is the source of anger as the leading cause of social stigma. The destruction of the social capital he had gained throughout his life by his son's

suicide has put the father in an irreparable emotional state. The anger of the grieving mother of the deceased is not as dominant as her husband, but she is in the same position as her husband in terms of stigmatization (*I think my aunt had a repressed anger. She thought, 'He disgraced me!'*). Being a member of one of the leading families in the town but having a questionable reputation overwhelmed the bereaved parent with anger and shame.

1-2. Anger toward the actors who caused the suicide

Actors who prepare the conditions that lead the individual to suicide or who do not seek solutions to the problems are also objects of anger.

1-2-a. Anger toward the father who makes no effort to recognize his wife's problems

Deniz is angry and resentful toward the family members who dragged his mother to death.

"I felt resentment toward my father for not being able to understand what my mother was trying to explain. I mean, it is not an accusation; that is his capacity, but there is also a little resentment because my father did not understand how it should be... He was expecting my mother to be happy in an image he had built. I mean, to understand my mother... Maybe he was incompetent, I don't know, but I did not see that effort. I mean, my father did not realize what she was trying to explain to him because he did not see it. My mother was an elegant and organized woman. As a result, there was always an argument and a fight... Moreover, my grandmothers (the deceased's parents) are the same..." (Deniz)

At the root of Deniz's anger and resentment is her father's insensitivity toward the problems of the deceased. In the statements of the social actor, there is a criticism of the expectation of consent and satisfaction from the female life drawn from a masculine perspective (*Because he expects my mother to be happy in an image he constructed.*). The deceased (mother), who completely fulfills the duties assigned to her in the division of gender roles, is unhappy because she does not receive the emotional reward for this effort. Moreover, her family is insensitive to the issue (*You will leave the house you entered in a wedding dress with a burial robe.*). The social actor tries to understand his father for not meeting his mother's expectations, but resentment and anger dominate. In the participant's statements, the position of the husband subject, who does not try to understand his wife's problems, is constructed in opposition to the position of the woman subject, who chooses suicide because her husband and family do not understand her.

1-2-b. Anger at the ruling power that announced the decree law

The fact that the Decrees Laws, announced in Turkey on September 1, 2016, were not justifiable was confirmed by the European Court of Human Rights' (ECHR) decision of September 26, 2023. It is possible to summarize the

illegality of the Decree Law, which is still valid in Turkey, as follows:

The coup attempt that took place in Turkey on July 15, 2016, turned into a civilian coup with the declaration of the State of Emergency (SoE) regime on July 20, 2016, and 152 thousand people were dismissed from their jobs with the Decree Laws (KHK) put into effect after this date. Although the State of Emergency was lifted 730 days after its declaration (July 19, 2018), unlawful practices in state institutions continued, and these practices have entered the literature of social sciences with concepts such as civil and social death. The victims of the emergency decrees were excluded from society, prevented from working in their professions and different jobs, and subject to a total of 146 types of rights violations. During this period, there have been one hundred and thirty suicides, thousands of deaths due to diseases that emerged after the emergency decrees, and divorces thirty times higher than the average in Turkey. Tens of thousands of people were imprisoned by criminalizing acts that are not crimes in the Turkish legal system, and hundreds of people lost their lives due to unlawful and inhumane practices in prisons (49).

On October 24, 2016, the 14-year-old daughter of Salim, who had been dismissed from her government job with the decree law announced on September 1, 2016, committed suicide, unable to bear the accusations of her schoolmates that she was “the daughter of a FETO”; FETO is a hate speech produced by Turkey’s current government (Justice and Development Party).

Three main social elements make the individual desperate and lead to suicide: The *state mechanism* that the civilians trust and rely on, the *social system* in which they exist, and the *family* that prepares the individual for these two areas. A strong shake in any of these three main factors that ensure the social existence of the individual is enough to lead the individual to suicide (34). In most of the suicides related to decree law, we see that these three factors occur at the same time and in the same situation.

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When Salim was deported by the state and society with the announcement of the Decree Law, his 14-year-old daughter committed suicide before he could realize what he was going through. The daughter, who committed suicide due to the violence of social exclusion, mediated the poison coming from the third vein for Salim. The question that comes to the fore is: How do individuals feel when the three main arteries that make life livable are blocked?

“I have no peace, and neither should you, O tyrant, I lost my grindstone. You have the same O Yezid with a miserable heart and without any kith and kin, May your home be filled with torment, May your beloved child be black soil, May your deeds be on your hands and knees! May the Creator and the angels cut you off! May your hands wither and your face never smile! May you stay between four walls, May you never see the light of day!” (Salim).

The preparer of the social environment that makes the life of the individual livable is the state mechanism and its executives. The execution of the state mechanism is inherited by the political power. When the laws that control political power become invalid, in other words, when the rule of law ceases to function, absolute injustice emerges, and some citizens fall into this social ruin. The dichotomy here is historical. Whether it is called oppressor/oppressed or oppressor/oppressed, the social manifestation of the uncontrolled use of power is no longer human and dehumanizes both the ruler and the ruled (50).

In the poem, the ruling power, which is the author of all the reasons that turn the life of the individual upside down, is labeled as the oppressor. The social actor, who lost his job with the decree announced by the ruling power, wishes the same disaster that befell him for the oppressor. In the expressions, the political power is labeled with the concept of Yazid, whose cruelty and evil are indisputable in the eyes of Muslims in the sense of being the murderer of the grandson of the prophet of Islam. Sending all the negativities experienced by the social actor to the ruling power as a strong wish and prayer is the manifestation of endless anger blended with pain. The wishes of the ruling power to deprive him of his job, joy, social circle, and family peace and to cause him to suffer the pain of burying his child (*May my work and power be ruined for you too/ Your heart is miserable, may your wife and friends not be left/ May your home be filled with torment/ May your beloved child be black soil*) are not enough to alleviate the anger of the social actor. Salim’s feelings toward the ruling power do not seem to reach serenity even in the presence of his successive wishes. According to the text, the *oppressor* must pay for what he has done to the innocent by experiencing the same things he has done.

May your deeds make you blind! May the Creator and the angels cut you dead! May your hands wither and your face never smile! May you stay between four walls, May you never see the light of day.

The place of the ruling power, coded as Yazid in the first lines of the poem, is clear in the Islamic imagination. Being the murderer of the grandson of the prophet of Islam is bad in itself. But even this general perception does not calm the anger of the social actor. The malevolent power, which is kept away from sacred arguments, stands at the center of the fierce anger of the *oppressed* (those left behind).

The codification of the oppressor as Yazid also marks the

absolute innocence of the mass of people with emergency decrees who are subjected to a social massacre by the oppressor. Therefore, just as the innocence of Hussein, the grandson of the prophet who was murdered by Yazid, cannot be discussed in the eyes of Muslims, the innocence of the mass of people with an emergency decree cannot be discussed before the law.

Ahmed (31), after asking how justice and injustice relate to emotions, argues that emotions include not only trauma and pain but also possibilities of repair. It is not known whether there is a possibility of reparation that Ahmet can point to at the point where the relatives of the victims of the emergency decree are. However, in this situation resulting from the dysfunctionalities of laws in the state of law, it can be said that healing and repair in the emotional state of individuals will be possible by returning to what is legal and just. However, given the current destruction, the scope of this healing and repair is a matter of debate.

2. Suicide is an act that brings shame to those left behind

Suicide, which has been deemed irrational throughout history, is a source of shame for the relatives of the deceased.

2-a. Talking about suicide and the deceased embarrasses the relatives of the deceased

Suicide, which stands outside the norm, also draws the relatives of the deceased outside the norm. This corresponds to a transgression that is unaccepted, stigmatized, and unrecoverable by society. Although there is no trace or mark on the body of those left behind by suicide to mark them with shame (4), there is an invisible stamp imprinted by society (3). This stamp invokes the feeling of shame.

“Everyone has always avoided talking about it. Everyone ran away. We could not even talk about it amongst ourselves. It is disgraceful, you know, it is a sin, you cannot talk about these things... In what way is it disgraceful? You know, to cover someone’s sin, to cover someone’s disgrace. I felt this a lot in my family. I mean my grandmothers. I felt it in them... Their children made a mistake; they were agitated, so let us not talk to them and upset them more. May Allah forgive them. You know, if we talk, we will also sin... after that, I mean, these kinds of thoughts...” (Nurgül)

In the social actor’s statements, there is a meaning that corresponds to the expression, “It was not what they said, but what they did not say (that mattered)” (3). The text of the speech depicts the understanding and virtue shown to a family that is stigmatized and embarrassed after suicide. Suicide is an immoral act in itself, and the deceased is the perpetrator of this act. Suicide is a disgraceful act, and the deceased is guilty and wicked. Therefore, these two sources have the power and influence to infect every area they touch with disgrace. It is inherent in the virtue of not telling the family about suicide and the deceased, of

acting as if this issue never happened, of not confronting them with something they should be embarrassed about. Covering up the disgraceful subject is also an extension of the fear of sinning against and thus being liable for punishment.

2-b. Suicide is an act that makes the bereaved feel guilty and ashamed

Suicide is an act that causes the relatives of the deceased to be blamed.

“If it were a normal death, you would cry more... It is as if she committed a crime... It is more... It makes you hesitate to say ‘She left’... No, I am not guilty... What she did as well... She should be ashamed... People... I mean, you know, do not blame... It is as if she punished me... I cannot get it out of my mind. Is it possible to get it out of your mind?” (Aysel).

The social actor has even forbidden herself from crying. The suicidal descendant is guilty in the eyes of the mother. Even if the participant does not feel guilty (*No, I am not guilty...*), society will probably blame her (2). In the eyes of the social actor (the mother), the daughter is guilty of loving the wrong man (married with children) and committing suicide because of this love. When the deceased, who knew her mother very well, realized that she could not find a solution to her love problem through normal means, she wanted to sound an alarm to her family members, but death was inevitable.

2-c) Love that is not lost in the spiral of negative emotions

The combination of negative emotions in the relatives of the people who committed suicide could not prevent the feeling of love and compassion.

“For example, the last time I went to the hospital when he was being showered, my sister could not lift her. We went to the hospital; I always said in tears, ‘I love you very much, my sister-in-law.’ (She cries for a long time).” (Gamze)

Although suicide leaves an unending pain, an immovable emotional burden, and an indelible stamp on those left behind, it does not destroy the love for the deceased. Love, reflected in a complex spiral of emotions, is the emotion that remains behind the beauty experienced together and cannot be prevented *despite everything*.

3. Suicide frightens those left behind because of making others want to commit suicide

Suicide has an encouraging and contagious effect on the social environment. This situation arouses fear in those left behind and strengthens the tendency to protect family members (21,52,53).

3-a. Fear of children’s suicidal tendencies

Fearing the temptation of suicide, parents have developed a deep sense of sensitivity and protection toward their children.

“How can I tell you? I am terrified, too. Because they were so pretty, they were so smart when they were children. But after they grew up, there were some troubles in their lives. When they were young, they could not live properly. I don't know how to say it; they could not live life; they always had troubles. Some of their problems may have been drinking... They did not see anything good in life. I think they think that we live it (drinking) very well. For example, my son used to laugh a lot, but now he does not laugh, and he does not talk to anyone; I do not know why. I am terrified that such people are around me (Emphasis). Really.” (Hülker).

Having witnessed the suicides of two cousins, at the age of 40 and 31, Hülker fears that her children will commit suicide as well. His doctor cousin committed suicide, leaving behind his 1-year-old child from an extramarital affair, and years later, his younger brother chose the same path (jumping off a balcony). The fact that the healthy and happy state of his cousins in their early youth did not prevent them from committing suicide led the social actor to worry about her children. Especially the emotional changes and suicidal tendencies observed in the eldest son multiplied this fear of the participant (*Because my son also says so...*). After his son's words, Hülker sought help from a psychologist and improved his emotional interaction with his son. The social actor struggles with the involuntary feeling of fear after the suicide of his cousins in different ways.

“When my children were small, I always feared they would do the same... However, we can call bad things to ourselves. I am always thinking, I am always scared, I am always thinking that they will come when this happens because it happened before my eyes. So I do not want to think about such things.” (Hülker)

On the one hand, the fear that her children would commit suicide, and on the other hand, the fear of invoking the catastrophe of suicide with a sense of fear exposed the social actor to multiple layers of fear. This situation prompted Hülker to take a closer interest in her children and put them under the protection wing. The inability of his cousins' *clean* and *happy* past to prevent suicide led the social actor to search for other reasons. The fact that her aunt was *weak* in terms of religious feelings and did not interfere with her children in terms of *free life* was a subject of criticism in the eyes of the participant (*In adolescence, for example, she did not forbid anything, no matter what they did. There is no religious life anyway.*). The social actor, who finds her aunt careless in terms of following religious rules and the *purity of her earnings* (halal and haram), thinks that living following religious rules will protect her from suicide and tries to draw her children into the safe space of religious life. In this context, the subject position of *the mother who harms her children by disobeying religious rules* is constructed next to the subject position of *the son who tends toward suicide by staying away from religious life*. Opposite to this

construction is the position of the *mother subject, who protects her children from suicide by following religious rules*.

3-b. Suicide, insecurity and fear

The suicide of a trusted parent is an emotional devastation for family members.

“I mean, even if he did not do anything, I felt strong when he was walking around. I was trusting, or rather, I felt safe. Now I am afraid of everyone. I cannot trust anyone. I am very uneasy about everything. I am like her now, ‘Can my child make a living? What will happen to my child in the future?’ I mean, I had not thought about these things much before. I used to think about it but did not worry about it. Now, it is up to me. I cannot trust anyone... I have such complicated feelings. I don't want to show this to the children” (Ayşenur).

The text of the speech emphasizes the confidence in the deceased's ability to deal with problems and make the right decisions and the comfort this provides to family members. The concept of trust here has two sides: The deceased is the one who is trusted to make healthy decisions and the one who takes care of the family members' worries about life. The suicide of the person she trusted deconstructed the emotions of the social actor, and the prominent sense of insecurity made the reconstruction of life difficult. Another emotional disturbance for Ayşenur is the burden of worrying about the future of her children. This burden, which was not felt before, was taken over by the deceased, and this situation led the participant to empower other family members.

“Let him stand up as soon as possible, defend himself, get on with his work, I mean, let him stand strong... You know, I have such a thing as soon as possible. He used to say, ‘You cannot see the future’; he was always afraid. You inevitably fall into many contradictions as to why he was afraid. I say this, but I am afraid of people for some reason. ‘We can do it,’ I tell my husband, ‘we have done it until now.’ We are used to it, so let us do this. Let us do that. You know, we were always together in consultation...” (Ayşenur)

After his grandfather's suicide, the social actor's 20-year-old son was treated in a psychiatric clinic for ten days and is still on medication. Ayşenur's husband is a mildly physically disabled person who has followed the decisions made by his father (the deceased) throughout his life. The social actor is in a hurry to share the burden of the suicide of the family decision-maker with the family members and to rebuild life by empowering them. The prominent theme in the text of the interview is the void created in the family after the departure of the deceased and the anxiety to compensate for this void. In this example, the void that emerges after suicide causes extraordinary trauma and anxiety about the future; empowerment comes to the fore as the basic need.

The intense confusion due to layered fears drives the

social actor to empowerment. However, the probability of being accused of not supporting the protagonist is another cause of concern.

4. *Feeling of guilt is inevitable for the relatives of the deceased*

Guilt is one of the destructive emotions that emerge in the relatives of the deceased. Suicide, which cannot be justified or affirmed, makes the bereaved's relatives direct suspects.

4-a. *Mother afraid of being blamed by her children*

The participant, who feels guilty for having not been able to prevent their father-in-law's suicide, also worries about being blamed by her children.

"Will my children think of something like this? Will they be affected by their grandfather's suicide? Will they question themselves or us, saying, 'Our grandfather did this'? Why didn't you support my grandfather?" I have such worries." (Ayşenur).

The suicide of an actor who had earned the complete trust of family members is a dangerous example for developing children. On the one hand, their children use the bereaved as a model, and on the other hand, the possibility of being blamed for not supporting the bereaved has brought out feelings of guilt mixed with anxiety in the social actor (Ayşenur).

4-b. *The mother feels guilty because she feels that she has failed to fulfill her responsibility toward her child*

The mother of the deceased feels guilty for not taking care of her children properly.

"My aunt blames herself first. 'I could not take care of them,' she says. But after this last incident, she said, 'I wonder if I did something bad to someone, why are my children like this?' But I think it could be something like that because she used to borrow much money from people. But she did not want to give them back. So, there were changes in my aunt, too. For example, she used to borrow money and say, 'I gave it to her; I gave her more,' but she did not return it. She borrowed too much." (Hülker).

The mother, whose daughter and son committed suicide within a few years, is searching for the cause of the suicide with intense grief. In the case of her daughter's suicide, she blamed herself for not being able to take care of her children sufficiently, but after her son's suicide, she started to look for different reasons (*Did I do something terrible to someone?*). It is noteworthy that Hülker supports her aunt's search for a moral justification for her guilt (*But I think it could be something like that...*). According to the participant, the moral problems of the mother of the deceased are likely to call for a malevolent act, such as suicide. After the suicide of his cousins, who were pure and clean in their early youth, Hülker became frightened and tried to distance himself from the moral reasons behind suicide. The background of the participant's stronger

orientation toward religion and his encouragement of his children to do so are the irreligious and *immoral* actions of his cousins and their mother, who committed suicide. In the text of the interview, the position of *the mother subject who calls for her children's suicide with her immoral action tendencies* and the position of *the mother subject who protects her children from suicide by refraining from immoral actions* is constructed opposite to her.

4-c. *If there is more than one suicide in the family, the family is inevitably to blame*

According to the teacher participant, who talked about the suicide cases she witnessed, her observations will be blamed on the social environment.

"She was 22–23 years old. The family could not make sense of her suicide. No one could understand whether she was withdrawn or had a lover. Or they did, but they did not want to open it before us. However, here, you know, no one wanted to open up about whether she had a female problem or whether she had a loved one. The suicide of a woman is in the background in these societies, and "something" is looked for. Then, a boy from the same family also committed suicide... He was (the girl's) brother. When that suicide also ended in death, the family became responsible for it." (Burçin)

The social actor's statements are signs of the manifestation of women and femininity in traditional society. Suicide, a taboo in itself, takes on an intimacy that is multiplied by the fact that the deceased was a woman and a single one at that (*I wonder if she had some kind of female distress?*). *Female distress* is a concept that can be so broadened that people in the social environment do not even feel the need to ask questions. According to the prevailing understanding, when a woman commits suicide, the family may not be held responsible for possible *feminine problems* because the family will be coded as innocent because of a stain on femininity or a relationship that was not consensual. However, when another member of the same family - a son - commits suicide, the family members become responsible for the suicide. Family members who freely expressed their innocent confusion after the suicide of the daughter lost this freedom after the suicide of the son.

"I don't know how the brother died, and I was just told that he committed suicide. So, the family was anxious. The same things were going on in the house, and (the boy) could not bear the death of his sister. There was a rumor that there was a girl he loved, but it did not work out, and so on..." (Burçin)

The second suicide in the same family has left the family members in absolute silence, closed in on themselves. What is said after the suicide is only a rumor; its source is unclear, and it is highly likely to be a personal interpretation. After two people in the family died voluntarily, the house turned into a place of grief and fear.

"After two children, if even one of them had a sore

foot, all hell would break loose in the house. Then their third son died, and the death of their third son was also sudden; he had a headache the night before, and the next day, he died of a cerebral hemorrhage.” (Burçin)

It is not clear whether the death of the third child in the family was suicide. However, even if the death of the third sibling was not suicide, it is clear that it was not independent of the suicides in the household. According to Durkheim (54), multiple suicides in the same household are not causeless; suicide is contagious and encouraging, especially for members of the same family. In this context, the deceased's relatives' fear of the suicidal tendencies of the other survivors is not unwarranted and unreasonable.

Results

The following findings were obtained in the research:

- All participants agree on the stigma and social exclusion due to being a relative of a person who committed suicide.
- The most important emotion that stands out near Münteşir is anger; anger is followed by shame, fear, anxiety, insecurity, and guilt.
- Anger is directed towards the people and motives that cause repentance and suicide.
- The anger of the decree victims was directed towards the administrative power of the state.
- The positive impact of treatment on those left behind is indisputable.

Discussion

In this study, we focused on the feelings of Münteşir's relatives and the cultural roots of their emotions. Various results were obtained, which both diverged from and supported the existing literature on the subject. The fact that the historical and cultural habitus of suicide preserves itself so much is an indication of an extraordinary and robust construction in a social world where change and transformation are essential. The reason why suicide is an unsolvable ball of problems and an immovable emotional burden for those left behind is that the social perception of suicide is deferential and stigmatizing. The stigma in the habitus of society and the emotional conflict brought about by this extraordinary death deeply affect those left behind, making the reconstruction of life difficult.

The research supports the finding that suicide shatters the lives of those left behind like never before (13,23,52). As emphasized in existing research (3,5), the most important factor affecting post-bereavement is stigma. The finding that survivors are not only stigmatized by society but also by themselves (56) is supported. The finding that stigma is the basis of anger, shame, and fear in those left behind (23,52,53) is also supported.

The main emotion that stands out in the research is anger. As Jackson (57) states, anger is a natural extension of the mourning process after suicide. Anger is directed at the deceased and the actors who caused the suicide. The

deceased, who has left those behind with an incorrigible stigma, is accused of powerlessness, betrayal, and ingratitude by family members. The intensity of family members' feelings does not diminish over time, and the suicide survivor's problems or mental illnesses do not serve as a means of legitimization for the relatives of the suicide survivor. The anger directed at the actors who cause or facilitate suicide also does not change direction or diminish in intensity over time. Parents who cause the death of their children due to their strict rules, and power elites who drive their citizens and relatives to suicide through state terror are among the important actors to whom anger is directed. The anger of those left behind has a self-reinforcing characteristic over time; anger feeds on its own power.

At the root of the anger, shame, fear, guilt and blame anxiety of those left behind is the fear of stigmatization and marginalization. Leaving behind unanswerable questions and an indelible stigma, suicide is a source of shame for the relatives of the deceased. The stigma, which has no tangible indicators but imposes itself with all its violence, is the natural cause of social exclusion for those left behind. The relatives of the bereaved, who have no chance to prove their innocence, are pushed out of society and shut in on themselves with the social burden they have to bear involuntarily. The research supports existing literature (12,23) that survivors become lonely and isolated from society due to feelings of shame, anger, and guilt. The fear that accompanies shame is based on the contagiousness of suicide. Suicide, which seems likely to be transmitted to other family members, has put those left behind on high alert and prompted them to take preventive measures. The results we reached on this subject support the findings of (53). Guilt and fear of being blamed are mutually reinforcing emotions. The fear of being accused of involvement in suicide is combined with the guilt of not recognizing the problems of the deceased enough. The complement of this complex spiral of emotions is the indispensable love for the deceased. The deceased, who deconstructs the lives of those left behind, is both the one who cannot stop loving and the one who is declared a traitor as an important component of the family history written together. Emotional turmoil arising from the combination of different emotions and helplessness is one of the prominent characteristics of those left behind.

The main feature that makes the research unique is related to the origins and tendencies of the anger of decree victims in Turkey. There is a chain of stigma in the experiences of decree victims: they are individuals who are stigmatized by the state, and whose relatives are driven to suicide because of this stigma. The emotion that stands out among these individuals is, again, anger, which is seen as the main reason for these tragic suicides and is directly aimed at the administrative power of the Turkish state.

Understanding the social manifestation in the aftermath of suicide is possible by understanding emotions, the

most important component of social action. The paucity of data on the subject is not independent of the isolation and emotional turmoil of those left behind. This study, which makes a small contribution to the subject, should be supported by more comprehensive data.

Conclusions

People whose relatives have committed suicide suffer a multifaceted emotional breakdown. The reasons for this emotional state are related to both suicidal loss and stigmatization. The stigma that emotionally burdens relatives of the bereaved is related to raising the level of social consciousness. Adjustments to the educational curriculum may be the solution, at least for the social order in the future. The bereaved person's relatives, whom we see as needing long-term therapeutic practices, can be served with periodic programs that can be developed within the understanding of the social state.

Limitations of the Study

The prominent limitation of the research is that the sample design is predominantly female, and the number of participants is not higher. Although 23 participants made it possible to make a general statement about the qualitative research design, the fact that the participants were predominantly women limited the diversity of the research results.

Another factor that negatively affects research is emotional contamination. For the researcher, writing an objective text by eliminating the influence of the participants' emotions took much longer than under normal conditions. During this process, expert support was received for emotional treatment.

Directions for Future Research

- New research, in which the sample design is enriched in terms of number and gender, will point to different results and solutions.

- Application Areas: In order to improve the quality of life of survivors after suicide, social support programs should be developed for the families of people prone to suicide, and scientific studies should support these programs.

Conflict of Interests

None declared

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