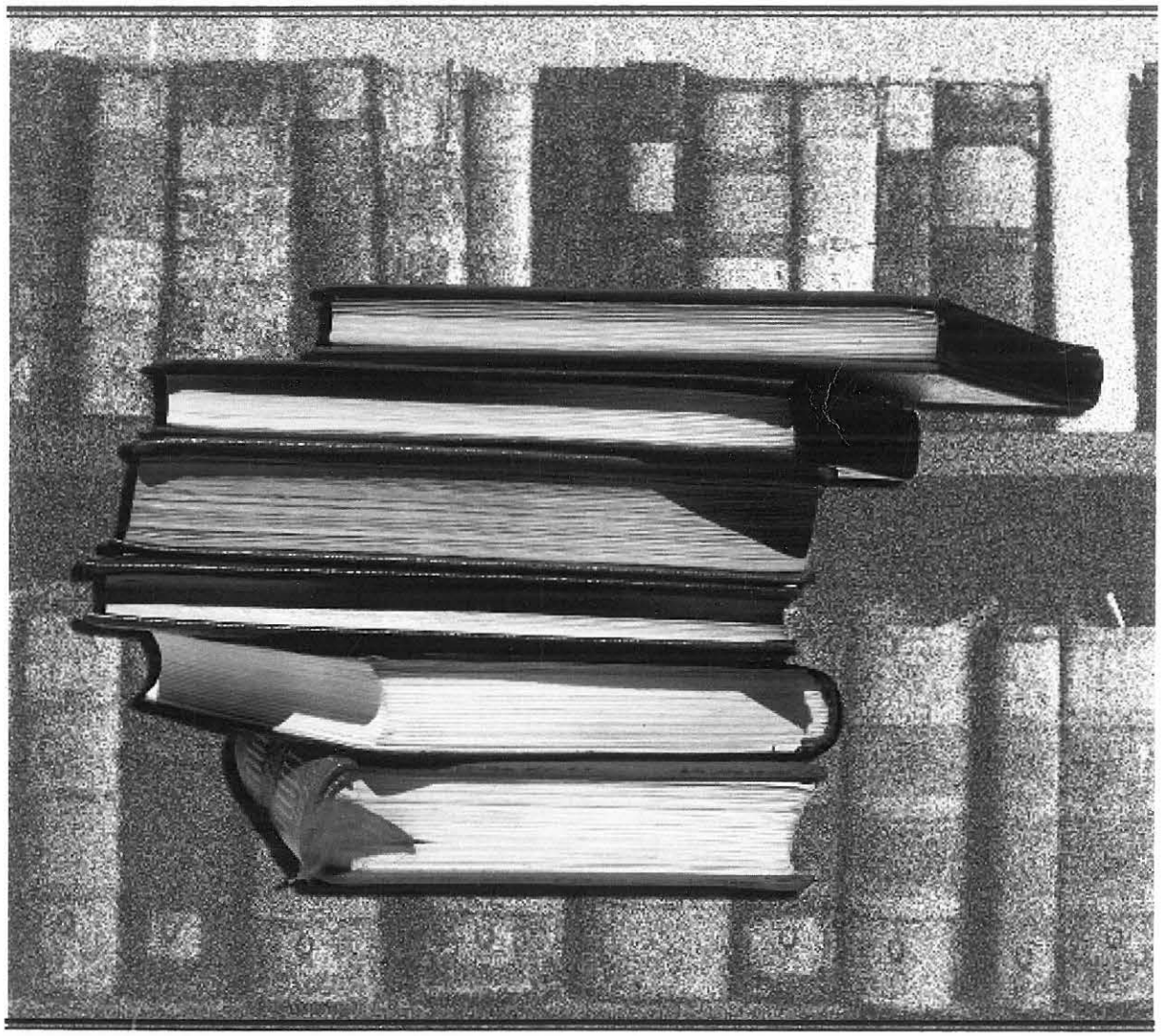
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Moral values and the parent-child relations in Turkish family

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Abstract

This paper examines the place of religious attachment and the role of moral values in the parent-child relations in Turkish family. What are the key variables in the parent-child relations? Do moral values particularly shape the nature of this relationship? What is the place of parental `role-modeling` in childrearing in Turkish family? These are the questions dealt with in this paper. The questions were examined through partial fieldwork and questionnaire conducted in several primary schools in Bursa, one of the largest cities in Turkey. The researcher has distributed 500 questionnaires to children and 600 to parents. All the questionnaires from the children were returned while only 396 out of 600 returned from the parents. The schools were selected from areas with various levels of socio-economical status. The data have been analyzed by DBASE III PLUS.

Keywords: Moral values; Turkish family; Religion education; Child education
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1. Introduction

Every human society wishes to bring up new generations according to its own national and moral values. Some of these values may be universal while others culture-laden. In passing the values to children, not only educational and religious institutions, or cultural policies but families too play an important role [1]. For children family is the first social institution. It makes it very significant for children that family provides the environment wherein not only are their social, psychological and physical needs met but their value perceptions are constructed as well. The economic, social, cultural and moral character of any given family makes an impact on not only the values that children learn but the way they express themselves and adapt to the society.

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The social and personal relations in which family finds itself are the key elements that shape the values and the behaviors of children. Children who live in families who are peaceful with themselves and others are able to develop their selfhood and moral values under a healthy supervision and role-modeling [2]. Families with less peaceful and healthy conditions in psychological, social, economical, and cultural terms will not be able to succeed in bringing up their children with a stable personality or installing `values` in their personalities as there will be incoherent relation between their thoughts-emotions and purpose in childrearing.

It is a well known fact that the relationship between religious and moral values or whether they are interrelated or not has been an ongoing debate in philosophical terms [3]. However, this paper within its limits will address not the philosophical nature of this debate but the question of whether `moral values` in Turkish culture are actually important for parents to pass them to their children.

According to Muslim educationists, Islamic religion is based on three intertwined dimensions, namely `faith, worship and morals`. What they describe as strong morals is believed to emerge from strong faith and practice. In Islamic ethos, religious practices are taken to be morally instructing rather than being a legalistic ritual. The Muslim educationists consider religious practices as a strong ground on which children can develop a good level of sense of love, respect, and attachment to God by which they also develop strong sense of positive thinking, senses and attitudes towards life as well as respect and love to their parents. It is believed that respect and love towards life and parents is the indirect result of the loving attachment to God [4].

This paper will attempt to see if this assumption by the Muslim educationists corresponds with the reality of Turkish society. To this end several practical questions were asked to children and their parents. These questions will investigate whether the particular Islamic definition of `God`, `the example of the Prophet`, `daily prayers` and `fasting` play any significant role in the bringing up of children in Turkish families.

The questions were examined through partial fieldwork and questionnaire conducted in several primary schools in Bursa one of the largest cities in Turkey. The research has distributed 500 questionnaires to children [5] and 600 to parents. All the questionnaires from the children were returned while only 396 out of 600 returned from the parents. The schools were selected from areas with various levels of socio-economical status. 421 responses from children and 378 from parents were found to be reliable to evaluate. In total, therefore we have 799 respondents in relation to the questions addressed [6]. This research has benefited from indirect and direct observation in order to get the best possible answers.

2. Acceptance of faith values

The following data shows the responses of parents to the faith-related questions (Table 1).

As shown in Table 1, 87.6% of the parents believe the basic faith tenet of Islam [7]. 9.2% believes in God but does not know how to describe Him, while 1.3% appears to have no specific idea and 1.9% seems to not follow an Islamic faith.

75% of children respond that they believe in God in the Islamic definition, while 18.5% believe but not know the attributes of, 3.9% with no idea and 2.6% expresses a non-Islamic definition of belief in God.

Table 1. Parental response in regard to the belief in God

Responses	N	%
I believe in the existence of One God the Creator, the All Knowing, All Powerful, Self-Sufficient, the Wholly Other.	324	87.6
I believe that God created humans and cosmos but He left humans free to themselves.	7	1.9
I believe in God yet do not know about His attributes.	34	9.2
I have no clear idea about God.	5	1.3
Other	-	-
Respondents	370	100.0
No response	8	
Total	378	

Table 2. Children`s responses with regard to the belief in God

Responses	N	%
I believe in the existence of One God the Creator, the All Knowing, All Powerful, Self-Sufficient, the Wholly Other.	291	75.0
I believe that God created humans and cosmos but He left humans free to themselves.	10	2.6
I believe in God yet do not know about His attributes.	72	18.5
I have no clear idea about God.	15	3.9
Other	-	-
Respondents	388	100.0
No response	33	
Total	421	

A simple comparison between the Tables 1and 2 will show that the percentage (87.6%) of parental responses to the question of `belief in God` in Islamic definition is higher than the percentage (75%) of the children`s responses. The percentage (18.5%) of children with `no knowledge about God` is higher than the percentage (9.2%) of the parental responses. This result can be seen as normal in terms of personal development.

Table 3 shows the responses about the belief in the prophethood of Muhammad

Table 3. Parental responses about the Prophet Muhammad

Responses	N	%
Muhammad is the prophet of God. He is the one I love most and wish to be closest to.	339	92.4
Muhammad is the prophet of God. But I do not know much about him.	19	5.2
Muhammad is the prophet of God. I am not interested to know more.	4	1.1
I see him as a famous leader with good qualities in history .	5	1.3
Other	-	-
Respondents	367	100.0
No response	11	
Total	378	

We can see that the 92.4% of the parents choose to say that they follow the orthodox faith principle on the prophethood [8]. 5.2% believes but knows not much, 1.3% believes that Muhammad is just a historical figure and 1.1% does not pay attention to this question.

Tablo 4. The responses of children on the Prophet Muhammad

Responses	N	%
Muhammad is the prophet of God. He is the one I love most and wish to be closest to.	303	78.7
Muhammad is the prophet of God. But I do not know much about him.	61	15.9
Muhammad is the prophet of God. I am not interested to know more.	3	0.7
I see him as a famous leader with good qualities in history .	18	4.7
Other	-	-
Respondents	385	100.0
No response	36	
Total	421	

Only 78.7% of the children agree with the orthodox definition of the faith in the prophet hood, while 15.9% believes but not know much about it, 4.7% perceives him as a historical figure and 0.7% accepts Muhammad as the Prophet yet does not express any interest.

A comparison between the parental responses with the responses given by children on the question of the prophethood shows that the parental knowledge and perception is understandably higher. A further comparison between the Table 2 on the belief in God and the Table 4 on the belief in the prophethood reveals that the percentage of orthodox belief of prophethood is higher with 78.7% compared to 75% of the faith in God, whereas the lack of theoretical knowledge about who the Prophet is lower (15.9%) than the percentage (18.5%) of those who do not know much about the theoretical aspect of the nature of God. This result is understandable considering that `godhead` is more abstract a concept than the prophet hood.

3. Attachment to religious practices

It is not an easy task to measure `religious practices` as such. Therefore within the limits of this paper, two specific types of Islamic religious practices have been chosen to investigate, namely daily five times prayer and fasting in Ramadan. The following findings are interesting to evaluate.

Table 5. Parental responses about religious practices

Responses	N	%
I regularly pray five times a day and fast in Ramadan	96	25.4
I pray occasionally (Friday, Eid, Special Nights etc.) yet fast in Ramadan.	181	47.9
I pray and fast occasionally only.	11	2.9
I would like to practice fully but I am not able.	79	20.9
I neither pray nor fast and have no interest.	11	2.9
Total	378	100.0

The Table 5 shows that 25.4% of the parents express that they do practice five times prayer and regularly keep up with the fast of Ramadan. Those who practice occasionally and in special days only consist of 47.9% of the parents which makes up to the half of the respondents. 20.9% wish to practice but not do so, while 2.9% say that they are not even interested in practicing.

Table 6. Children responses about religious practices

Responses	N	%
I regularly pray five times a day and fast in Ramadan	42	10.3
I pray occasionally (Friday, Eid, Special Nights etc.) yet fast in Ramadan.	207	51.0
I pray and fast occasionally only.	49	12.1
I would like to practice fully but I am not able.	10	2.4
I neither pray nor fast and have no interest.	98	24.2
Respondents	406	100.0
No response	15	
Total	421	

As can be seen in the above table, 10.3% of the children pray regular five times a day and keep up with Ramadan fasting. Those who pray occasionally yet fast regularly consist of 51.0% of the respondent children, while only 12.1% say they practice occasionally compared to 2.4% of children who neither practice nor wish to. 24.2% of the children says that they do not practice yet they would like to do so.

4. Parent-child interaction

The relationships between parents and children are multilayered. It is natural that children are influenced in religious matters mostly by their parents. It is in this context that this paper considers that religious practices such as daily prayer and the fast of Ramadan have `behavioral` dimension, and therefore can be analyzed in terms of parent-child interaction. The following two tables indicate the close relevance of the place of `role-modeling` and `respect-love` in parent-child interaction.

Table 7 shows that 64.3% of mothers and 33.3% fathers of regular-practicing children practice regularly. From this comparison we can conclude that mothers have more influence on the children. One major reason for this is perhaps that in Turkish society men do work outside and mothers spend more time with their children. A good relationship between parents increases the chance of teaching moral values to children.

Table 8shows the role of `love and respect` in parent-child interaction.

The table 8 shows us that 95.2% of religiously practicing children live in families with no problems in terms of `respect and love` in parent-child relations. Only 4.8% of the respondent children indicate that they live in a family with some problems only. This result can be interpreted as indicating that creating a respectful relationship in the family provides a strong ground on which values –religious or otherwise- can be best passed to children.

5. Conclusion

Islamic sources emphasize the importance of setting moral examples and approaching life with love and respect. The most widely quoted passage from the Quran is the verses 2-3 in Chapter 61:

`*2.* O You who have attained to faith! Why do you say one thing and do another? *3.* Most loathsome is it in the sight of God that you say what you do not do!.` (The Quran 61: 2-3) [9].

Table 7. The role of `role-modeling` in parent-child relations

Variables		Responses I pray five times a day and fast in Ramadan. (children)		Percentage Among the 406 respondents
		N	%	
Mother (Model Behavior)	She regularly prays five times a day and fasts in Ramadan.	27	64.3	6.7
	She occasionally (Friday, Festival, Holy nights etc.) prays five times a day and regularly fasts in Ramadan.	14	33.3	3.4
	She occasionally prays five times a day and fasts in Ramadan.	-	-	-
	She neither prays nor fasts and does not wish either.	1	2.4	0.2
	She would like to practice properly yet not able to do so.	-	-	-
	Total	42	100.0	10.3
Father (Model Behavior)	He regularly prays five times a day and fasts in Ramadan.	14	33.3	3.4
	He occasionally (Friday, Festival, Holy nights etc.) prays five times a day and regularly fasts in Ramadan.	22	52.4	5.4
	He occasionally prays five times a day and fasts in Ramadan.	1	2.4	0.3
	He neither prays nor fasts and does not wish either.	5	11.9	1.2
	He would like to practice properly yet not able to do so.	-	-	-
	Total	42	100.0	10.3

Table 8. The role of `role-modeling` in parent-child relations

Variables		Responses I pray five times a day and fast in Ramadan. (children)		Percentage Among the 406 respondents
		N	%	
Family with no problem of respect and love	In my family the relationship between parents and children is excellent with love and respect.	40	95.2	9.8
Family with some problems of respect and love	In my family there are some problems in terms of love and respect.	2	4.8	0.5
Family with serious problems of respect and love	In my family there are serious problems in terms of love and respect.	-	-	-
Total		42	100.0	10.3

Muslim educationists also refer to the early Islamic history where the success of the Prophet is believed to be due to his `setting an example` for the new Muslims [10]. Dddd [11]. In Islamic literature on education, a number of Quranic passages and hadiths are quoted referring to the moral virtue of `loving without condition` [12]. The concluding remark of this

paper is that to a certain extent Turkish family in general still live according to the general ethos of Islamic morality and the families who maintain love, respect and `good example` in their relationships (95.2%, Table 8) can provide better environment for their children to adopt moral values that would also help them to develop stable personalities.

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[5] The age of starting the primary chool in Turkey is 7 while the average age group at the year 8 is 14.

[6] Saglam I. Cocuk ve Ibadet, Dus unce Kitapevi Yayınları, Istanbul, pp. 37-42, 2003 [in Turkish].

[7] In another research conducted on adults in İzmir, %83.7 of the respondents said that they believe in God. (Koktas , M. Emin; Turkiye'de Dini Hayat, Istanbul, p. 78, 1993) [in Turkish]..

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