

WAS THERE A BETTER TIME TO BE MOTHER? PAST AND PRESENT OF THE SOCIO-CULTURAL FEAR OF CRIME

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ABSTRACT

Fear of crime refers to the fear of being a victim of crime, and it is nurtured by folklore and the media. Folklore fosters fear of crime by using oral tradition transferred throughout generations by updating old contexts into modern times. On the other hand, the media visualizes the possibility of being a victim by introducing the real-life experiences of victims. Contrary to folklore, victims presented in the media seem more accessible, and the victimization of individuals can be proven. Folklore and the media have cooperated to keep the fear of crime alive to warn society that individual lives are on the verge of becoming victims of criminals. In this paper, I aim to describe the fear of crime through two particular crimes: Child abductions and organ thefts. Data for this research comes from two sets of materials: Newspaper news stories and semi-structured interviews conducted in face-to-face settings with mothers from two different generations. My research reveals that mothers of the eighties were scared of their children being victims of beggar gangs and organ trade criminals, while generation Y mothers suffer from the possibility of their children being victims of online grooming and sextortion.

Keywords: Folklore, media, fear of crime, urban legends, organ theft narratives.

INTRODUCTION

The fear of crime encompasses the pervasive apprehension experienced by individuals, who constantly harbor concerns about becoming victims of specific criminal acts. Fear of crime is defined as an emotional response of fear or anxiety toward the crime itself or symbols that individuals associated with it (Ferraro 1995, 4). Scholarly understanding related to fear of crime has been clustered in two centers. The first group focused on emotional responses corresponding it to emotional stress felt by the innocent who lives according to the law, fearing being the victim of specific crimes (Ferraro and LeGrange 1987). Others focus on its multifaceted effects on the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses of the person (*e.g.* Gabriel and Greve 2003). This emotional response is characterized by a sense of peril and anxiety, predominantly stemming from the perceived threat of physical harm. Fear of crime can be traced through emotional responses to crime or

symbols associated with the symbols of it. Ferraro and LeGrange suggest that fear of crime can affect the judgment of individuals who estimate the risk of victimization. According to this process, individuals relate certain acts, spaces, times, and conditions to the possibility of victimization (1997). The social repercussions of this fear can be profound, leading individuals to modify their daily routines, withdraw from community engagement, undermine social cohesion, and erode trust in neighbors and relatives. Consequently, individuals may adopt sequestered lifestyles to safeguard themselves and their loved ones. While fear of crime primarily relates to the potential for physical harm, it is also nurtured by apprehension regarding potential property loss (Garofalo 1981; Karakuş *et al.* 2010; Jackson 2011). Emotional and behavioral reactions stemming from fear of crime manifested through strictly controlled behaviors in order to reduce the risk of victimization (Ferraro 1996). Individuals estimate and respond to risk through avoidance, protective, or defensive behaviors (Silva and Guedes 2022, 3). Individuals often associate specific behaviors or symbols with criminal activities, thereby fostering social paranoia and engendering a marked disparity between actual crime rates and the perceived fear of crime, with the latter frequently exerting a more potent influence than factual reality (Taylor and Covington 1993; Warr and Stafford 1983). In the scope of my research, I mainly picture how fear of victimization in organ trade affects the attitudes of mothers who grew up listening to organ theft narratives, and fear of crime was transformed through generations.

METHODS AND DATA

During my research project to understand folkloric and cultural reasons behind the reluctance for cadaveric and live organ donations, I realized that organ theft narratives influenced altruistic organ donations. Conducting field research, I encountered many informants growing up hearing organ theft narratives, who did not want to donate their organs as the stories had made them scared of being victims of the organ mafia. Focusing on the demographic information recorded in their consent forms, I realized they had been born in the late fifties or sixties. Therefore, I scanned national news from the 1970s to see if there were stories published that would feed their fears. I found that the first organ transplantation news was published at the beginning of the seventies, and this news was only about organ transplantations that took place abroad. When the first successful transplant operation in Türkiye in 1975, rumors about the possibility of organ transplantation came to be true. At the time of this pioneering transplant operation in Turkey, my informants, who would later be scared of organ theft stories, were between ages 13-18. It was not until September 1980 that possible donors' healthy organs would be known to have a market value (Hürriyet 1980). Even though news in the media indirectly confirmed that organs had cash value in the market, verifiable organ trade news was first broadcast in Turkey on February 2, 1997. Most of my informants (Table 1) stated that they feared being targeted by organ trade organizations if they donated their organs while alive. I also witnessed female informants with children justify their fears by referencing the organ theft narratives

they heard from their acquaintances. This experience led me to investigate how and to what extent motherhood as a social status made women experience fear of crime.

I conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with mothers (n=15) born between 1955 and 1965 and their daughters (n=15) born between 1980 and 1995. At the beginning of fieldwork, I contacted a lawyer friend with two children and her mother with three. With their help, I used respondent-driven sampling to recruit the informants. Hence, I could interview mothers and their daughters who experienced motherhood separately between August 10, 2022, and October 10, 2022. Apart from the name of the cities, all other names were given under pseudonym of common Turkish names, as protecting the privacy and security of participants is the primary ethical responsibility of the researcher (Hicks 1977; Amstrong 1993; Guenther 2009; McCormack *et al.* 2012; Svalastog and Eriksson 2010; Brear 2018).

Interview questions were classified into four groups: 1. Demographic information, 2. Sources of actual fear of crime: personal experiences of direct or indirect victimization, 3. Sources of unrealistic fear of crime: urban legends 4. Self-protection strategies against child abduction and organ theft. All informants participated voluntarily in the study and lived in Ankara, the capital of Türkiye. Researchers have previously noted that fear of crime increases in urban environments (Pain 2000 370; Farrall, *et al.* 2004; Karakuş 2013; Greenberg and Ruback 1992; Skogan and Maxfield 1981; Bilen *et al.* 2013). Therefore, Ankara would be an ideal place to investigate women's fear of being victims of crimes. While the mothers' interviews unveiled the fear of becoming a victim of child abduction in the eighties, their narratives disclosed the fear of crime perceived toward organ theft. On the other hand, their daughters reflected their fears of sexploitation and online grooming.

While mothers in the first group represented baby boomers, their millennial daughters belonged to generation Y. As previous studies suggested that gender and status may affect fear of crime, I also investigated if motherhood makes women vulnerable to developing a fear of crime for specific crimes (Chiricos *et al.* 2000; Cops and Pleysier 2011; Çardak 2012; Erdönmez 2009; Goodey 1997).

Table 1. Informants' age

Age brackets	Number of informants
25-30	1
31-35	8
36-40	2
41-45	4
46-50	-
51-55	-
56-60	3
61-65	5
66 and above	7

The secondary data were collected from the news that appeared in newspapers to observe if child abductions and organ theft cases were prevalent. While indirect fear of crime mainly originated from urban legends that are

supposed to happen to others whose identities are referred to third parties, such as coworkers of a friend or acquaintance of a relative, news and personal experience narratives of personally known people mirror the direct fear of crime level. Interviews showed that the urban legends related to child abduction and organ theft were told in the structure and functions of horror stories. Before conducting interviews, the Ethics Committee Approval for the research was obtained from Bartın University Social and Humanities Research Ethics Board with the document number SBB-0055.

FOLKLORE AND FEAR OF CRIME

In the past, folklore was commonly understood as comparing and identifying the survival of archaic beliefs and customs in traditions of the modern age. It was attributed to people below a certain level of culture (Gomme 1890, 3). This limited definition of folklore only embraced illiterate peasants who were able to store and transmit their folklore in face-to-face interaction. For a long time, the ability to write and the setting of cultural transmission functioned as critical criteria to decide whose folklore was worthy of study (Newell 1891). The breakthrough of folklore, which enhanced its dimensions with communicative, aesthetic, and performative aspects of life, came with the definition of folk itself (Dundes 1977). This broad definition of folk opened the gates that swaddled all aspects of life, in the past and present. Criminal folklore, a relatively new area to study, focuses on forbidden knowledge transferred throughout generations. It is folk knowledge that members of subcultures or groups gathered around illegal activity and non-criminal actors tell, practice, know and transfer throughout generations about crime and criminals (Karataş 2021, 21). Since illegal activity has always been a part of human life, a significant amount of knowledge has been accumulated over the ages. Botkin's definition of folklore may well serve to understand how crime and folklore are related. He defined folklore as new wine in old bottles and old wine in new bottles (1944, xxi). What matters is how wine, and bottles are transferred to new generations. Therefore, folklorists must focus on where human behaviors come from and how they evolved into modern forms. People with direct or indirect contact with criminal activity are oral sources of criminal folklore, and non-criminal actors live at the edge of crime during their lifetime. Even though we all live only one step away from this threshold to stay out of trouble, one can find himself as an offender or victim. We pursue our lives knowing that crime and criminals are around us, and we take a lesson from narratives regarding criminals or victims. At this point, narratives function as guidebooks that teach us to stay away from the wrong places and people. Crime-related narratives are a subcategory of urban legends in which an experience is attributed to a "friend of a friend". Urban legends, according to Brunvand, were formerly termed urban belief tales, contemporary legends, modern legends, urban rumors, and modern urban legends reflecting the social concerns of modern life in cities, and suburbs (1996: 1509). Their credibility comes from the events and people mentioned in the plot, which are familiar to us. These narratives reflect the contemporary concerns in society,

and this increases the captivity of narratives. Furthermore, they are told and listened by individuals regardless of class, age, or gender (Brunvand 2001).

Numerous studies have noted that crime news that appears in the media increases the fear of crime (Ditton *et al.* 2004; Taylor and Covington 1993; Warr 2000; Warr and Ellison 2000; Jackson 2006; Heath and Petraitis, 1987; Chiricos *et al.* 1997, 2000). However, few imply that urban narratives keep fear of crime alive (Campion-Vincent 1990, 1992, 2002a, 2002b, 1997; Çelik 2005; Scheper-Hughes 1996; Blache 1999; Brunvard 1993, 2001; Burger 1996; Atreya and Nepal 2019). Folklore has always been among the sources of fear of crime, shifting its focus from old forms of crime, such as sorcery, and adultery, to contemporary ones. Folklore has nurtured the perception of risk through urban legends warning anyone can find themselves as a criminal or victim. As a matter of fact, urban legends regarding crime, reflect social anxiety, and fear. Terming these specific urban legends as crime legends, Donovan (2002, 190), draws our attention to their aggressive and solidaristic functions. Aggressive features of urban legends intervene with our sense of safety, suggesting we are all alone to protect ourselves. With her words, narratives disrupt the hearer's confidence in the protection provided by official guardians and official sources of warning about crime threats. Yet, narratives also offer a valid warning, a gesture of protection.

Furthermore, urban legends can be formulated and transmitted by mouth-to-mouth conversation and media, accelerating the rate of circulation. As de Vos noted, they can be transmitted electronically via e-mails (2008, 479). Urban legends mostly draw our attention to the safety of our bodies, minds, and possessions. They use the method of authentication to increase the credibility of the story. The most familiar form of the method is telling the story by attributing the experience to a "friend of a friend", and the audience may safely suppose that the teller knows the owner of the experience. Urban narratives facilitate the cultural elements, names, and spaces that are familiar to the listener as well, which helps listeners not to ask the question of "How this can be possible?" Tellers, according to de Vos, can tell the urban legends as if they listened, read, or watched them, which increases the credibility of the narrative (2008, 479).

People tell these stories to kill time in conversations and small talk in waiting rooms, bars, and trips. Rape, violence, child abduction, murder, organ theft, and any other crime that listeners might be a victim of in the future can be the theme of the narrative. After the teller presents his story, oral transmission continues, and the listener turns into the teller. One can wonder how a conversation comes to a point where the teller tells a story about a crime or victim. The answer to this very question is hidden in experience. While waiting for a bus, I eavesdropped on two women. The younger one complained about her daughter spending too much time on interactive computer games. The older one started to tell a story in which her sister's neighbor's young daughter had met a boy in online video games. The boy asked her to share her naked photos with him, which she did. According to the story, the boy wasn't a boy but an adult who was working for a prostitution gang. Obtaining her photos, he started to blackmail her. He sold her to other adults until she committed suicide. According to the story, the young girl was a well-behaved student with great

potential. The story's focus was that even brilliant, well-taught kids could fall into the trap of being victims of crime. Urban legends regarding offenders, victims, or offenses may present themselves in conversations once tellers want listeners to know what happens to other people when they are not careful enough to watch their back or make a mistake to feel safe at the wrong time.

Folklore is a national storehouse where society keeps folk knowledge accumulated throughout generations. This knowledge contains joyful, proud, wise elements and dangerous, sinful, and inglorious components. As the proverb suggests, if the crime were gold, no one would own it. That is why folklore of cultures throughout the world have idioms to justify accidental criminals as "victims of fate." Even though society tends to ignore that offenders are also members of society, innocent members of the community are aware that we live in a World in which crime was and is prevalent. This social reality becomes consumable in media and folklore, where crime and victim-related stories always have appetent consumers. On the one hand, audiences enjoy being grateful for not being in the wrong place and time; on the other hand, they fear that the same thing may happen to them in the future.

Folklore and media work together to create and nurture the fear of crime in modern times. While folklore nurtures listeners' desires, media fulfills spectators by supplying them with visual crime-victim stories. Thus, folklore and media create awareness of crimes that are mostly unfamiliar to society, such as pin-prick attacks, public masturbation, and organ theft. The stories circulate publicly until authorities gain an understanding of recently discovered crimes. At this point, the legislation creates penal codes for inventors. According to Blumer's theory, the media is at the center of legislation since the latest crime first appeared in the media long before law enforcement authorities heard of them. Mouth-to-mouth conversations strengthen the media's impact on fostering fear of crime involving newly discovered crimes. Indeed, studies show that fear of crime first appeared with oral tradition's mouth-to-mouth circulation. Second, rumors become the subject of non-script daytime shows, of which most audiences are women and laymen. Third, legislators discuss how to react against these new crimes (Blumer, 1971, 300; Spector and Kitsuse 1977, 145; Rosengren 1978, 131). People who stay away from crime and fear being a victim are entirely unguarded during these stages; both the tellers of stories and the media overstate elements of the victim stories to strengthen the story's effectiveness over audiences through dramatization, background music, and performance. The leading message of both shows and narratives is that if you trust people around you and are not vigilant about possible situations, you may become the next victim of the crime presented.

While media distract society's attention from the social and cultural factors that cause crime and direct it to the pathology of the criminals, folklore supports the idea through urban legends that criminals are everywhere around us; they might even be in our households. As Lambrosso suggested, the media intervene with our perceptions of crime to create a fear of crime. In his words, since the media's intervention presents crimes with a focus on the criminal, we direct our feelings toward the criminal instead of the crime (2010, 265). Therefore, we perceive crime as a social event rather than a social phenomenon that individualizes crime in

parallel with the offender. Lambrosso's theory must be enlarged by the influence of folklore in fostering fear of crime.

Crime has always been a best-selling story, providing consumers excitement and small reasons to be grateful. Being exploited by crime stories, people become aware of the violent experiences of victims and become thankful for not being one of them. Since media and folklore present criminals by focusing on their personalities and appearances, criminals' criminalized behavior and physiological characteristics are placed in social memory in the form presented in these stories. The stereotypical characteristics of criminals in Anatolian-Turkish folk tales, for example, often include ugliness, lameness, beardless faces, particular tones of voice, being too short or tall, slimness, dowdiness, squinting or glassy eyes, and stuttering (Demir 2018, 48; İçöz 2008, 100-105; Sönmez 199, 199-267; Yüksel 2011, 44). Cross-cultural studies noted that these physiological features and disabilities had been marked to draw our attention to possible offenders (Bull and Green 1980, 80-82; Lambrosso 2006, 54-58; Ellis 1910, p. 86)¹. In folklore, particular crimes are hereditary as well. Madness, for instance, is inherited. Likewise, ancestry comes before beauty; nobility or being a lady or gentleman is passed down through the familial lineage, associating criminals with so-called genetic tendencies to commit crimes (Karataş 2018; Demir 2018; İçöz 2008; Yüksel 2011).

Furthermore, when presenting the offenders, the media provide their medical history and early childhood experiences and often add interviews with character witnesses who testify that something was wrong with them. According to Sanders and Lyon, the media presents criminals' tendency to delinquency by linking them to explanations such as childhood illnesses, experiences, lack of moral education, orphanhood, and weakness (1995, 26). Hence, the line between the world of criminals and the world of the ideal citizens is drawn. In this very context, fear of crime serves political interests. Shows and news about the fight against crime encourage voters to incline toward the governments that promise electors to devote the maximum budget to fight against crime to sustain the public's safety. Therefore, TV programs about crime and criminals make up a third of daily live broadcasts. Live shows mostly feature suspicious murder cases. Stories of sexual crimes, fraud, and theft stories rank second in daytime shows (Gerbner 1972, 156; Kappeler and Potter 2005, 25; Bohm 1986, 205; Öztürk 2015; Rader *et al.* 2012). During the presentation of the criminal story, the audience is convinced that violent crimes stem from greed and jealousy, criminals get caught by the police sooner or later, and audiences are warned to stay calm but vigilant.

FEAR OF CRIME THROUGH GENERATIONS: "TIMES HAVE CHANGED A LOT"

As generations form their fear of crime in relation to their time, it is the most influential factor in the social perception of criminal behaviors. Furthermore,

¹ Proverbs are also used to mark possible criminals. "God protect me from the beardless man," "salute from the altar the beardless man and woman," and "trust not the woman with a man's voice, and a man with a woman's voice" illustrate how proverbs are used to criminalize particular people in terms of their appearances (see Ellis 1910; Lombroso 2010).

it designates our reactions toward particular acts and determines which is a crime. As people's social, physiological, and moral needs and expectations change, culture update norms to satisfy contemporary trends. Meanwhile, the state is forced to address the legal requirements of the public by introducing, abolishing, or correcting laws. Therefore, the history of penal codes mirrors a society's reaction to particular social behaviors. Additionally, societies can progress or regress in technology, science, and democracy. Those of developed, in particular, meet new crimes. Developments in technology and science open the door slightly, creating favorable conditions for the emergence of new crimes. As people are caught unprepared, criminal entrepreneurs exploit their ignorance until personal experience narratives of victims reach legislators' ears. Indeed, urban legends regarding cybercrimes, pinprick attacks², and organ trade started to circulate long before the penal codes were enacted. To illustrate, narratives about pinprick attacks started to circulate in the late nineties, long before the first victim was recorded in Konya in 2003 (Hürriyet 2003; Milliyet 2003). The needle attacks caused fear of crime in Konya, Adana, Bursa, and Ankara and finally became the subject of penal codes in 2004³.

Similarly, organ trade and trafficking were introduced into the modern world with advancements in medicine. Even though organ transplantation operations were successfully conducted in the sixties, the potential of the human body to reject transplanted organs limited the operations⁴. The medical use of cyclosporine in preventing and treating the rejection of transplanted organs 1983 led to more successful transplants (Hatzinger *et al.* 2016)⁵. Turkish regulations enacted in 1979 have allowed patients to accept organ donation from spouses⁶ and from blood or in-law relatives up to the fourth degree. the law permits cross-transplantation as well (Mevzuat 2022b). However, not all patients are lucky enough to have willing and healthy donor candidates. That is why regulations also allow patients to look for non-kin donors, provided that donors do not sell their organs to patients and the ethics committee grants permission (Mevzuat 2022b). Although the first organ transplantation trials in Turkey go back to the late sixties, the first successful operation was conducted in 1975. Knowing advancements in modern medicine have made organ transplantation possible since 1954, we may be surprised that the

² A pinprick attack is an assault on a victim with a needle or syringe with bodily fluids of someone carrying fatal contagious diseases. The first nonfatal pinprick attack was reported in New York and committed by teenage girls in 1989. On the other hand, the first deadly attack happened in 1990 in Australia with an HIV infected syringe. The victim tested HIV positive and died eight years after (see Atreya and Nepal 2019).

³ Pinprick assaults were classified under negligence injuries in 2004. Even though Turkish laws do not directly point to pinpricking, it defines it as committing a crime of injury (see Mevzuat 2022a).

⁴ Joseph Murray performed the first long-term successful kidney transplantation in 1954. Transplantation was done between monozygotic twin brothers. The transplanted organ survived for eight years (see Hatzinger *et al.* 2016).

⁵ The first organ transplant accompanied with immunosuppression performed in 1960 (see Hatzinger *et al.* 2016).

⁶The regulations for organ Donation between spouses were amended in 2018 with law 7151. If the disease requiring organ transplantation is diagnosed after marriage, the two-year marriage requirement for organ donation between spouses is no longer mandated (see Mevzuat 2022b).

first organ trade was reported in the eighties in the World. 131 kidney patients from UAE and Oman traveled to Bombay between June 1984 and May 1988 with their surgeons and received kidneys from unrelated Indian donors paid between 2600-3300 USD (Price 2000; Salahuden *et al.*, 1990). A year after the use of cyclosporin in transplant surgery, the organs from living unrelated donor candidates turned into cash value in illicit markets.

Organ theft narratives, as a subcategory of urban legends, feed the fear of being a victim of the organ trade. Studies show that organ theft narratives were first circulated in the late eighties – just after the very first successful operations – in Peru, Brazil, South Africa, and the United States (Ansion 1989; Scheper-Hughes 1992, 1996; Blache 1999; Brunvard 1993, 2001; Brednich 1991; Moravec 1993; Burger 1996; Campion-Vincent 1990, 1997; Çelik 2005). According to Scheper-Hughes' research, organ theft narratives originated in Central and South America and later surfaced in Eastern Europe (1996). Human rights groups investigated the stories, and the European Parliament condemned alleged operations in 1988. Organ theft narratives so frightened the public that, in Ansion's words, the government in Peru had to shut schools down for a few days (1989). Italian variants of narratives claimed that hundreds of poor children were kidnapped for their organs. According to these stories, mobile organ transplantation gangs hunted poor and healthy children in the streets of the poor neighborhoods of Rome. A series of news investigated these narratives asking whether missing children were kidnapped for their organs (Toselli 1991). In Turkey, on the other hand, the first national news on organ trade appeared on February 2, 1997. Before the story was broadcast, organ theft narratives were in mouth-to-mouth circulation, feeding the anticipated fear of crime. According to the accounts of Çelik (2005), organ theft narratives had already tainted the daily life in Anatolia, presenting friends of friends as victims in the organ trade at the beginning of the nineties. The earliest record of organ theft narratives compiled in my fieldwork dates back to 1992. Some young informants (n=12) had heard organ theft stories when they were in middle school, and others (n=3) in high school back then. Respondents remembered their teacher's and relatives' narratives as if narrators knew the victims. Nurgül and Fatma (32- and 33-year-old informants) pointed out that their mothers told organ theft stories to warn the young to be aware of possible offenders when they were in middle school. My informant, Fatma, described her memories using these words:

I was a student in middle school in Ankara. My aunts heard that a young girl was kidnapped as she returned home from school. The rumors frightened my parents terribly. They asked my grandmother if she could move in with us. My grandmother had to drop me off at school and then also pick me up until I started boarding school. Even then, I wasn't allowed to leave the school without company. My mother warned me not to drink or eat anything offered by strangers, and she kept reminding me during telephone conversations.

While confirming her daughter, Fatma's mother added that kidnap narratives tainted her early motherhood experiences with anxiety. While her maternal instincts focused on protecting her children from beggar gangs in the eighties, the mid-nineties introduced organ theft narratives.

I married in 1978 and became a mother the following year. Stories were circulating that beggar gangs were kidnapping young kids. It was said that they cut off children's arms, hands, and legs or blinded their eyes to turn them beggars. Back then, people told these stories pointing to witnesses. I can't refute them because I also heard such a story. My neighbor's sister-in-law had twin boys. One of them disappeared while he was playing in the playground. The police couldn't find him. After some years, my neighbor's relatives claimed they had seen the boy begging in Istanbul. They said that boy responded when they called his name. But they couldn't save him as members of the mafia grabbed the child and ran away.

Nurgül's mother, on the other hand, didn't believe the stories, but still took precautions. While she was relatively calm in the face of kidnapping stories, she believed in organ theft stories.

In 1983, I was a mother of two. Stories about children abducted by beggars were told everywhere. I couldn't completely believe the truth of these stories. Even so, I kept my kids in sight constantly, dragging them around with me. No one wants to learn terrible things by experiencing them. It is better to watch out. In the nineties, on the other hand, my daughters were in high school. I got worried about whether organ mafia stories were true. They sounded so true. People warned each other in all kinds of social gatherings. After a while, I got paranoid.

The mothers in the first group (n=13) complained that they had experienced deep anxiety while raising their kids as stories of children abducted by beggar gangs or kidnapped for the organ trade were popular. On the other hand, a few of the mothers (n=2) stated that even though they did not experience fear of being a victim in the organ trade, they still took measures to avoid being a victim. Necmiye and Hülya heard stories about child abductions and were careful against possible hunters. Hülya said, "I took precautions and entrusted the rest to Allah." On the other hand, Merve, Hülya's 29 years old daughter, disagreed with her mother. She complained that she couldn't enjoy her high school years as her mother was constantly thinking of the worst scenarios that might happen. Her mother kept telling Merve victim stories in which even her male peers could not protect themselves, suggesting that she would be much more disadvantaged if she were a victim.

My mom didn't let me start boarding school, which was one and a half hours from home. During my high school years, it was also out of the question for me to sleep over at a friend's house. Once, she told me a story that happened to a friend of a friend of hers. An acquaintance of this friend let her teenage son spend the night at his friend's house. The father of his friend was a member of the organ mafia. He was using his son as bait to hunt others' kids. The mother got a telephone call from the police in the middle of the night, saying her son had been dumped in front of the hospital, and one of his kidneys was missing.

The organ theft narratives that circulated in the nineties compiled in my fieldwork have common elements: 1) Innocent victim who is drugged or ambushed, 2) Removal of a victim's kidney in unhygienic conditions by a non-surgeon in a home, hotel, or warehouse 3) Malicious but merciful criminals who dumped the victim at the door of a health facility 4) Victims, whose kidneys had been removed in unhealthy settings, arriving at hospitals just on time while

surprisingly still alive. One of the most characteristic elements is that all of them teamed stolen kidneys. Even though other vital organs were able to be transplanted at the time, such as the heart, liver, and lungs, narratives facilitated kidneys as a horrifying element in the plots.

In order to evaluate the credibility of the narratives, I went through national news that appeared between 1975 and 2002 to see if any kidnapping cases were related to the organ trade organization. None of the stories on missing children or kidnapping (n=106) was related to organ theft. When I traced the news, I saw that most of the children were found by the police. Some of the rest escaped voluntarily and were photographed as they were reunited with their families. The fate of the twelve missing children remained unknown. Although the news of these children with unknown fates continued to be published on successive days, after a while, they ceased. Indeed earlier studies point out that most of the reported kidnaped cases turn out to be that they willingly escaped (Fritz and Altheide 1987, 483-488).

Turkish organ transplantation and donation regulations, which have been effective since 1979, clearly and strictly state that only fully informed adults older than 18 can be living donors. The regulations (Resmi Gazete July 1979) mandated doctors to conduct ethical research to ensure that possible kin or non-kin living donors donate organs for altruistic motivations. Listeners might have credited the stories as unrelated organ donation was approved fully informed notarization back then. However, none of the news that appeared in the nineties indicated that missing or kidnapped children ended up as victims of organ trade. The national news during these times included unrelated adult male donors going abroad, or victims who became willing donors in organ exchange within the borders of the country due to economic reasons.

Furthermore, the news and police reports mentioned victims as paid donors selling either their liver lobes or kidneys, but organ theft narratives only contained stolen kidneys of kidnapped or missing children. Apart from the news that appeared in 1980, the most shocking news about Turkey's organ trade criminals was Uğur Dündar's broadcast on TV and published in national newspapers. This news shocked the country, revealing that organ trade rumors were partly true. For the first time, a doctor, who has been dubbed Dr. Frankenstein since, was shown in a clean white coat and under Hippocratic swear while taking part as an actor in the organ trade, which is perhaps what made this news so shocking. Until this news, organ theft narratives' credibility came from news reporting events that happened to strangers living in third-world countries. With this story, Uğur Dündar exposed the existence of profit-oriented criminal organizations that abuse poor people willing to sell their organs, proving that the narratives that have been told for nearly a decade were accurate to a certain extent on February 2, 1997.

One of my questions aimed to test the effects of this news on my informants. The news eased the fear of most of my older informants (n=11), assuring them that only adults could donate or sell their organs. With its visual, audio, and verbal content, this news taught people about organ transplantation and donation laws and informed them that possible offenders do not target children. However, Aynur, my 68-year-old informant, was not convinced and asserted that organ trade criminals

might have detained children abducted in the past until they came of age. The rest of my informants (n=3) stayed impartial, stating that narratives could still be true not knowing the fate of missing children.

During my research, I witnessed parents born in the fifties and sixties persuaded their children to withdraw their consented donation forms, scared that they would be targeted by organ trade gangs scanning the names on the national organ donation list. During my fieldwork, I came across individuals who interceded for patients looking for paid-living adult donors and witnessed many relatively young people seeking buyers. Since the ethical board decides if unrelated organ donors could proceed to operation and investigate the relationship between prospective recipients and donors strictly, many applications face being turned down. Experienced and informed patients with organ failure already knew this, and I witnessed that only inexperienced and impatient patients were willing to seek for paid-donors. As a consequence, I came across many swindled and disappointed patients (more than 17) in Ankara who couldn't report their victimhood since the law strictly states that being part of organ trade – selling, buying, or intermediation – is subject to jail time, plus a fine. During the nine months spent in the field, I didn't witness the elements presented in organ trade narratives. Compiling nearly sixty narratives (n=58) from my informants, I saw that these narratives intervene with the judgment of prospective donors presenting generation baby boomers. Their fear of being the victim of the organ trade produced an avoidance response, one of which was rejecting organ donation while they are alive. On the other hand, mothers born between 1980 and 1995 seemed to have a fear of crime fostered by multiple sources: Folklore, mass media, and social media. As they were born into the digital age, mothers mostly feared that online predators would victimize their children.

According to a recent report, 94.1 percent of the Turkish population today have internet service in their houses (TUIK 2023a). Surveys also showed that children (6-15 years old) spend almost seven hours a week online for extracurricular purposes. Nearly seventy percent of these children have smartphones with access to the internet, and 33,1 percent are active on social media. 66.1 percent of participants reported that they also enjoy spending time on online and offline games (TUIK, 2023b). The most interesting result of my research was that millennial mothers, as opposed to their own mothers, are afraid that their teenage children might run away from home because of online blackmail. Aylin, a 36-year-old informant, expressed her opinions as follows:

Our mothers were luckier than us. They were afraid that ill-intentioned people would kidnap us. Now all of those people have online access to our houses. None of us, mothers, can be sure if our kids are chatting or playing with one of the predators. Girls (pointed to her daughters surfing on smartphones) have their own tablets, phones, and laptops. I am fed up with stories of little girls videotaped or photographed in games, WhatsApp, and Snapchat. Criminals do not even bother to kidnap children today; they create horrible situations, and children run away scared of shame.

Urban legends, social media posts, and news create an environment in which the children of millennial mothers are represented as prey of online predators. As opposed to the first group, some young mothers (n=2) pointed out that organ

trade criminals may hunt their victims through social media or interactive games, but blackmailing would still be used in order to force their children to run away from home. Hence, I can assert that online blackmail is at the center of the fear of crime today, and the focus of fear of crime has evolved from children being kidnapped by criminals into being forced to run away from home through online blackmailing. Article 102 in the Turkish penal code states clearly that in violation of the physical integrity of another person via sexual conduct, the offender will be sentenced to imprisonment for five to ten years upon the complaint of the victim. On the other hand, child abuse is subjected to Article 103, which states that any person abusing a child sexually will be sentenced to eight to fifteen years of imprisonment (Küpeli 2019, 90-91). However, the legal process requires the victim to complain, and the parents of victims may not always be willing to report their experiences. Therefore, official reports and statistics do not reflect the prevalence of sextortion and online grooming cases. Surveys showed that only 10 to 17 percent of the victims report their experience to law enforcement after frequent online threats (Berson 2003; O'Connell 2003; Wolak and Finkelhor 2016; Thorn 2017). Likewise, apart from Aynur, my child psychiatrist informant, none of the others told the stories as their own experiences.

Urban legends of blackmailed victims were also mostly gendered. Only four boy victims were in the narratives (n=17) compiled during my fieldwork. While gendered narratives present young girls as victims of pedophilia, prostitution, and child porn, three blackmailed boys ended up being drug dealers, and only a little boy was the victim of pedophilia. Online blackmailing took place through sextortion and grooming. In the first case, victims were forced to perform sexual acts or share explicit images through which the victim was then blackmailed to pay money or obey the blackmailers. The second is emotional manipulation, through which the offender gains the trust of the child in order to set a personal meeting that may result in sexual abuse, physical violence, child prostitution, and child pornography (Kopecký 2017, 12; Raymond Choo 2009, 7; Çıkman *et al.* 2017, 89). Studies state that teenagers are vulnerable to becoming victims of online blackmailing as they are easily scared and often ashamed of informing the adults in their lives (Wilson 2011; Gavrilović Nilsson *et al.* 2019; O'Connell 2003). Surveys conducted with victims revealed that offenders threaten them with posting images to their acquaintances and keep stalking their victims in 60 percent of the cases (Wolak and Finkelhor 2016, 31-36; Babchishin *et al.* 2011). Online blackmailing may reach a life-threatening level. There have been cases where victims feel helpless and commit suicide (Hürriyet 2012d; Lester *et al.* 2013, 179; Berson 2003; Gavrilović Nilsson *et al.* 2019, 60).

My informant, Aynur, a 36-year-old mother with two teenage boys and a child psychiatrist, told me that at least two mothers bring their children for therapy every week after they send nudes or videos to total strangers they met online. Mothers seeking help mostly focus on their children's mental health and safety and are afraid to disclose their identity, so they mostly prefer to keep their situation secret. Mothers do not wish to disclose their experiences, so these cases remain unreported. During my archive research, I could find national news between

2005 and 2022 (n=6) in which only one parent reported online predators. Unpleasant events regarding blackmailed children were exposed either by accident or as a result of follow-up law enforcement operations. Wolak and Finkelhor found out that only 13 percent of victims reported victimization. More than fifty percent of the victims did not disclose their situation to a family member or a friend, mostly due to shame or fear of repercussions (2016).

In the six national news stories, seven girls were among the victims. One of these news stories on blackmailed children warned parents recounting a police operation in which a teenage boy had become a drug user due to online blackmailing (Hürriyet 2012a; 2012b; 2012c; 2012d; 2017; 2019a; 2021). Apart from local events, two international events, from Germany and England, were introduced to warn parents and teenagers against online blackmail. A review of the contents of these stories showed that only one parent reported that her kid had been forced to pay money for fear that her pictures would be shared online. Only my child psychiatrist informant Aynur was able to recount verifiable personal experience narratives of victims of online sextortion or grooming, in total 3 narratives. The source of other narratives (n=14) was solely folklore. Melike, a 32-year-old informant, accounted a story heard from a friend:

An acquaintance of my sister's neighbor had a daughter who engaged in interactive games named PubG. She was playing a lot. Her grades started suffering. She started hating her parents. Her parents thought it was a phase. She was hiding her phone and set a password. So, her parents didn't know what was going on. Her mother heard voices at night and got up. She entered her daughters' room. She found her talking on the phone. She took the phone, there was a guy on the other end. As soon as he heard the mother's voice, he hung up. She couldn't convince her daughter to show her phone. After begging for hours, the daughter let her go through her smartphone. But the mother was unfamiliar with smartphones and couldn't find anything. After a week, her daughter was detained by the police, together with a man who was a pimp. This guy had obtained nude pictures of the girl and she was scared of them being exposed. He blackmailed her for months. The poor little girl was actually very strong, I wouldn't be able to go through this kind of torture. The police had been following this guy. Hopefully, the family got their daughter back home. But it was luck.

Common narrative elements are more detailed than the texts of news appearing in newspapers. First, the experiences of victims are attributed to third parties who can't be reached but are trustable. Second, the plots of the narratives contain various sources of threats: names of interactive games, chat programs, such as Snapchat, TikTok, and Instagram. They also list the symptoms of blackmailed children: Their interest in classes decreases, and their grades suddenly drop. The tensions of typical adolescence become unbearable because of the child's fear of being exposed. Third, millennial mothers find out about their children's experiences as a result of a fortunate accident, discovery, or police operation. Fourth, mothers are forgiven because they are unfamiliar with chat programs and interactive games. This suggests to the listener that this may happen to any mother despite doing her best to protect her children. The teller of the narrative adds details of how the victim's mother handles her kid with gloves to encourage

audiences not to accuse the mother of neglecting her child. Narratives also reflect the gendered fear of crime. While boys end up being drug consumers or sellers, female victims in narratives (n=12) were sextorted or groomed for sexual abuse, child pornography, or child prostitution. In narratives of online blackmailing of child victims, the true fear is not the possibility of financial exploitation of families, but the folklore-fed belief that children would be subjected to drugs, pedophilia, or child porn.

CONCLUSION

Previous studies on fear of crime mentioned the media as one of the strongest sources nurturing fear of crime. Only a few, indirectly, dwelled on how folklore may also foster fear of crime, particularly in the case of contemporary crimes. It is understandable as folklorists are reluctant to conduct fieldwork among criminals or victims because of an ethical burden. Exposure to trauma narratives experienced by victims in the field can be exhausting for the researcher. Conducting this kind of fieldwork also forces researchers to be willing to obtain bureaucratic permissions apart from the regular ethical board approval.

This research also mirrors the oral history of fear of crime and of the crimes affecting the social routines of mothers who experienced motherhood in the eighties and the millennium. My interviews reflect that folklore effectively nurtures the level of anticipated fear of crime. Since victims in the urban legends are presented as third parties whose experiences are either not provable or deniable, the audience keeps being aware of particular crimes, which already made the victims suffer and may do so to the listeners in the future. On the other hand, the media presents true victim stories, which in turn increases the credibility of urban legends circulated in face-to-face conversations. Even though national and international news (12 in total) does not adequately represent the actual fear of crime, readers cannot deny that some people suffer from particular crimes. Folklore and the media elevate the risk perception of ordinary people who are afraid of being victims. As numerous scholars have noted, status, gender, age, and early experiences, among others, make individuals vulnerable to being prospective victims of certain crimes (Henson, *et al.*, 2013; Farrall, *et al.*, 1997; Ferraro and LaGrange, 1987).

The main focus of my research was to depict how motherhood affects the perception of fear of crime and how folklore and media collaborate to cultivate fear of crime regarding organ theft and child abduction. My research showed that folklore impacts anticipated fear of crime through urban legends of victims whose experiences are unique to the period, and their long-term effects can intervene with life-altering decisions. With regard to organ donation, women who grew up listening to organ trade narratives were unwilling to be listed in prospective cadaveric donor lists, fearing being targeted by organ trade organizations. Since time and culture define the sources of fear of crime and the types of crime on the rise, mothers of the eighties were scared of their children being victims of beggar

gangs and organ trade criminals, while generation Y mothers suffer from the possibility of their children being victims of online grooming and sextortion. Since the urban legends regarding to online blackmailing is now on the rise, It is difficult to know if they will have long-term effects on individuals who experience adolescence today. But we can safely assert that they already managed to alter the routines, and priorities of millennial mothers and teenagers. To sum up, while mothers in the first group feared that their children would be kidnapped, those in the second group lived in the fear that their kids would not be able to cope with embarrassment in the face of online blackmail and be forced to run away from home. Most of my informants in the second group (n=13) claimed their mothers were luckier by comparing the time periods in which they raised their kids: “Times have changed a lot.”⁷

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