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WHAT DEFINES THE INTERGENERATIONAL RESISTANCE OF THE SATURDAY-MOTHERS?

From Orhan Kaya, May 16th 2024



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The unyielding resolve of the Saturday Mothers is a symbol of Turkey's political struggle. A study conducted with the University of St Andrews shows that intra-familial transmission, shared experiences, and common goals of the initiative are fundamental factors enabling activists to continue their pursuit of justice.

Deutsche Version

In the old streets of Istanbul, there's a group of moms shouting silently for justice: the Saturday Mothers. These women meet every Saturday in Galatasaray Square to protest and find out what happened to their missing relatives. This initiative, which plays a big role in Turkey's political scene, stands up against human rights violations.

In Turkey, since 1980, within the **Kurdish-Turkish conflict**, hundreds of Kurdish activists continued to be **abducted and disappeared** by the state security forces. Human rights abuses and cases of torture in custody were increasing every day. Starting in 1995 during a dark time in Turkey, the **Saturday Mothers** emerged as political arrests and disappearances rose. A group of moms came together to break the silence and demand justice. They gather in Galatasaray Square every week to remember their losses and demand justice. These meetings are not just for remembering but also seen as acts of resistance.

The initiative has become a symbol of human rights advocacy in Turkey. Despite changes in government, these women have continued their search for the missing and their fight for justice. Initially, it was just mothers protesting, but over time, all family members joined, and the number of activists grew. The Saturday Mothers not only represent the stories of a few families looking for their missing loved ones but also mark a significant moment in Turkey's political history.

Conducting Academic Research with Vulnerable Groups

Research conducted in collaboration between **St. Andrews University** and Bern University of Applied Sciences showed that the Saturday Mothers initiative is more than just a protest movement led by a group of women: it is a legacy of resistance passed down from generation to generation. In this **research**,

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experience to identify the factors motivating the actions of the Saturday Mothers and the transmission of their collective action across generations.

The Saturday Mothers represent a group of individuals who have lost loved ones and have been subjected to repression and trauma. Working with them poses several psychological and legal risks due to the sensitive nature of their experiences. Therefore, meticulous preparation was necessary to overcome these risks and establish a trustworthy working environment. As a research team, we developed a detailed plan and strategy to minimize these risks and establish communication and trust with the group members.

Initially, significant preparation was done to establish communication and build trust with group members. Joint meetings were held between group members and the research team. The purpose, goals, and process of the research were transparently explained. Details such as the composition of the research team, methods to be used, and how the obtained data would be used were shared extensively. Two members of the initiative were included in the research team. Additionally, explicit permissions were obtained from group members on every matter, and they were actively kept informed at every step.

Throughout this process, it was crucial to avoid triggering traumatic experiences, causing harm, and respecting their sensitivities. Furthermore, necessary measures were taken to protect the privacy and security of group members, and we operated while considering risks such as disclosing information without their consent.

Working with the Saturday Mothers, despite posing many emotional and mental challenges, is crucial in supporting their quest for justice and promoting societal transformation. Therefore, with a carefully prepared research plan and adherence to ethical principles, the value and impact of research on this important issue can be enhanced.

The Importance and Future of the Saturday Mothers Initiative

Research conducted in Istanbul indicates that the Saturday Mothers initiative is a legacy of resistance passed down through generations. Based on our research, we have identified three key themes that contribute to the continuity of the Saturday Mothers' activism.

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- **Intra-Familial Transmission:** Families comprising the Saturday Mothers actively transmit their political attitudes and activism processes to the new generations through intra-familial discussions. Consequently, succeeding generations become politicized within their families and engage in activism.
- **Common Goal:** The collective goal of the Saturday Mothers is to illuminate the fate of the disappeared individuals and hold the responsible parties accountable. This shared objective unifies group members and ensures the continuity of their activism.
- **Shared Experiences:** The convergence of families who have undergone similar tragedies facilitates the sharing of common experiences and hardships. This fosters a sense of closeness among group members, promoting solidarity.

These themes constitute the foundational pillars of the ongoing activism of the Saturday Mothers. Intra-familial transmission, common goals, and shared experiences forge strong bonds among group members, enabling them to act collectively and sustain their advocacy efforts. These findings demonstrate that the Saturday Mothers initiative not only holds promise for today but also for future generations.

Over the years, the Saturday Mothers have begun to embrace broader segments of society, suggesting that the impact of the Saturday Mothers initiative will continue to grow and strengthen. Additionally, by raising awareness among younger generations about human rights, the Saturday Mothers initiative will inspire future struggles for justice.

In conclusion, the Saturday Mothers initiative is not just the silent cry of a group of women but also a significant milestone in Turkey's democratization and progress in human rights. While reminding of past injustices, this initiative will continue to be a symbol of hope and resistance for future justice.

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- Kaya, O., & Acar, Y. G. (2023). From Collective Action to Collective Resistance: Working with the Saturday Mothers. In *The Political Psychology of Kurds in Turkey: Critical Perspectives on Identity, Narratives, and Resistance* (pp. 129-143). Cham: Springer International Publishing

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Literature and Reference Links:

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