

Perceptions of farmers about Turkish Gendarmerie: A phenomenological analysis in Bozkurt

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Abstract

The aim of this phenomenology study is to reveal what the Turkish Gendarmerie means to Turkish farmers and how it is affected after the experience of agricultural crime victimisation. In this study, semi-structured interviews conducted with 21 farmers who were exposed to agricultural crime between 2017 and 2019 in Bozkurt were analysed with the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis method. Results show that farmers interact with the gendarmerie from their childhood. As time passes, they experience the positive qualities of the gendarmerie and construct a positive perception of the gendarmerie in their minds. Many farmers experience the caring and successful practices of the gendarmerie after being exposed to crime and reinforce their positive perceptions. On the other hand, farmers who are not satisfied with this process do not experience a radical change in their positive perceptions. It is possible to conclude that this situation stems from the positive perception of the gendarmerie that farmers have constructed in their minds since their childhood and that the gendarmerie means much more than a simply a rural police force for them.

Key words: Turkish Gendarmerie; Türkiye; rural policing; agricultural crime victimisation; perception of farmers

Introduction

Probably the most characteristic topic of rural criminology is agricultural crime (Barclay, 2016). Farmers' perceptions of rural police have an important place in agricultural crime research. Extant literature shows that farmers are generally dissatisfied with rural policing services (Harkness & Larkins, 2019). Researchers have found that this dissatisfaction negatively impacts farmers' trust of rural police and results in the underreporting of many crimes to the police (Anderson & McCall, 2005; Barclay, 2003; Harkness, 2017; Holmes & Jones, 2017). Contrary to these findings, the Turkish General Command of Gendarmerie (abbreviated as J.Gn.K.lığı), which is responsible for the safety and security of most of the rural areas in Türkiye, is one of the most trusted institutions by the Turkish public (Aydın et al., 2019). The aim of this phenomenology study is to reveal what the Turkish Gendarmerie means to Turkish farmers, and how it is affected after the experience of agricultural crime victimisation.

Agricultural crime and farmers' perception about rural police in an international context

Agricultural crimes include crimes against property, which farmers are exposed to in connection with agriculture and animal husbandry (Anderson & McCall, 2005; Barclay, 2001). These crimes that seriously harm farmers (Anderson & McCall, 2005; Mears, Scott & Bhati, 2007; Smith & Byrne, 2017) often lead to interactions between farmers and rural police. Although there are some significant studies in the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom, studies on farmers' perceptions about rural policing services elsewhere are very limited but commonly show that farmers are not satisfied with rural policing services.

The closure of police stations in rural areas and the adoption of a city-centred management approach, in countries such as Australia and France, have reduced the satisfaction of rural residents with law enforcement services in many countries (Mawby, 2004; Mouhanna, 2021; 2023). Among the farmers who participated in Anderson and McCall's (2005) Australian farm crime study, only those who experienced victimisation reported their opinions about police. While new implementations such as the NSW Police Force Rural Crime Prevention Teams are beginning to successfully change this situation (Whiteside, Brennan & Mulrooney, 2023), police contact with rural residents in Australia generally occurs only after an incident. While some farmers criticise this issue severely, others describe this as a natural consequence of living in a large rural geography. Some farmers state that despite the devoted efforts of police officers, they cannot be effective in a large rural area owing to the lack of personnel, equipment and training (Anderson & McCall, 2005). Apart from these views, which attribute inadequacies to rural disadvantages, farmers' views about accessibility of rural police are not generally positive (Harkness, 2021; Mulrooney, 2021). A similar situation exists in Wales, too. Lack of communication between the police and rural residents is one of the two negative aspects identified by the farmers who participated in Holmes and Jones' (2017) study.

Barclay (2003) found that Australian victims of livestock theft who reported the offending to police often faced the implicit accusation that they were victims because of their own lack of safety precautions. Similarly, some of the farmers who participated in the Australian study of Anderson and McCall (2005) stated that they were accused of imprudence and incompetence by the police after reporting the crime, and that they were even accused of stealing other's livestock. Farmers who participated in the same study stated that despite the fact that they reported the crime and provided new information, there were some cases where the police did not investigate.

In the Welsh study by Holmes and Jones (2017), it was found that most farmers see the police only as a mechanism that gives the necessary official documents to get their money from insurance companies. Farmers in Victoria, Australia also indicated low levels of satisfaction with police for various reasons (Harkness, 2017; 2021). The farmers, who believe that agricultural crimes are out of the focus of the police, stated that the police officers favour people whom they have good relations with, and that they do not have technical knowledge to solve agricultural crimes. For these reasons, farmers stated that reporting crimes is a futile effort (Harkness, 2017).

These results show that there is generally no positive communication between the farmers and the police officers working in rural areas. One of the first approaches that attribute great importance to the positive communication of the police with the people they serve in order to be successful is Community Policing (CP). CP also provides a theoretical framework for this study.

Community policing

Community policing is a law enforcement management philosophy that argues that the way to prevent crime in cities is to find solutions to social disorder (Przeszlowski & Crichlow, 2018). While it includes modern principles such as accountability, proactivity and problem solving, the role model of philosophy for how the relationship with the citizen should be is pre-modern community life (Weisheit, Wells & Falcone, 1994). One of the main objectives of community policing is to integrate the control mechanisms specific to community life into society life in its modern form. In this direction, the basic principles of the philosophy are that the police are responsible for a certain community, interact directly and intensively with the members of that community, are not limited to crime but take responsibility for everything that the community see as a problem, and try to ensure social order through partnership with community members. It is generally accepted that these principles and practices, which should be taught to urban police organisations, are inherent in rural policing (Wooley & Smith, 2022). However, the international literature on victimisation of agricultural crime suggests that this belief is not as valid as one might think. The Turkish Gendarmerie can be considered as a different example.

Turkish Gendarmerie (J.Gn.K.lığı)

J.Gn.K.lığı is one of two general law enforcement agencies in Türkiye, together with the Turkish General Directorate of Security (EGM). The Command was founded in 1839 and is responsible for ensuring security and safety in 93 percent of Türkiye's surface area where 21 percent of the population lives. The majority of this area consists of rural settlements and rural areas (J.Gn.K.lığı, 2023b).

In Türkiye, official statistics show that there are fewer crimes in rural areas than in urban areas (J.Gn.K.lığı, 2013). However, there is also significant evidence that rural crime is on the rise. According to gendarmerie records, the number of public order offences increased from 164,451 (914 per 100,000 rural residents) in 2010 to 293,495 (1,630 per 100,000 rural residents) in 2022 (J.Gn.K.lığı, 2011; 2023a). This situation also increases the importance of the Command.

Compared to rural police in developed countries such as Canada and the United States, the personnel number of the Turkish Gendarmerie per 1,000 rural residents is approximately more than three times larger. A total of 171,338 professional personnel, including 5,730 officers, 37,264 non-commissioned officers and, 128,344 specialised sergeants, work within the Command. The personnel are educated in the Gendarmerie and Coast Guard Academy (JSGA) and various training units of the Command. Officers receive five year undergraduate degrees and non-commissioned officers receive two year associate degrees at JSGA. Specialised sergeants, alternatively, are recruited as at least high school graduates and start their duties following their training (J.Gn.K.lığı, 2023a). Among the personnel who successfully complete a certain number of years, those who are selected through an examination receive different training and are assigned to specialised units of the Command, such as the Crime Scene Investigation Team, Crime Investigation Team, Traffic Team, Environmental Protection Team, Intelligence Units and Fighting Against Smuggling and Organised Crime Units.

The Command have announced that suspects were identified at the first moment in 91 percent of the public order offences in 2022: 11,121 of the 27,298 incidents those suspects were unidentified at the first moment were illuminated as a result of the investigations carried out in the subsequent process, and the capture rate of the all identified suspects was 96 percent (J.Gn.K.lığı, 2023a). While these are very ambitious official data, open to doubt and criticism, the results of academic studies also show that the Turkish people are very satisfied with the acts of the Command, respect the Gendarmerie (Ergün, 2021) and consider it among the most reliable institutions in the country (Aydın et al. 2019).

Methodology

This study consisted of qualitative data, in the form of interviews, which were collected in the Bozkurt district of Denizli between November 2018 and February 2020. Denizli is a province in the Aegean Region in western Türkiye. Bozkurt is located in the east

of Denizli and it is approximately 52 kilometres from the city centre. It covers an area of approximately 400 square kilometres and 12,671 people live in Bozkurt's 20 settlements. The Gendarmerie is responsible for the safety and security of 14 settlements where 6,149 people live.

The main livelihood of the residents of the district is agriculture and animal husbandry. The number of businesses registered in the Farmer Registration System is around 1,500. Police are on duty at the district centre. The average number of offences recorded by the police is about two times larger than the Gendarmerie's. Based on the Gendarmerie crime records, Bozkurt has a slightly below average crime rate compared to other districts (J.Gn.K.lığı, 2013). With these qualities, it is possible to characterise Bozkurt as a typical Gendarmerie district.

According to formal crime records of the Bozkurt District Gendarmerie Command, 36 agricultural crimes occurred between 2017 and 2019. Although there are some differences, the study conducted by the J.Gn.K.lığı (2013) on theft crimes, and a brief review of current events in the Gendarmerie Law Enforcement Operating Programme, show that the nature of the cases reflects the average agricultural crimes occurring in the overall gendarmerie district.

The goal of this research is to understand how victimised farmers reconstruct their perceptions of the Gendarmerie. Therefore, the seriousness of the agricultural offence is less significant than the farmer's perception and identification as a victim. According to Strobl's (2010, p. 6) typification, victims can be categorised as "actual (a person regards himself/herself as a victim and is also regarded as a victim by relevant others)" or "rejected (a person regards himself/herself as a victim but isn't regarded as a victim by relevant others)" and this categorisation was used in the present study.

A purposive sampling method (Neuman, 2013) was used to recruit farmers who were interviewed. Eighteen cases were chosen and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 victims (see Table 1). In accordance with the approval obtained from the Ethics Commission of Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University, the 'Informed Voluntary Consent Form for Participants' was read and explained to all farmers before the interview and their signed consent was obtained for their voluntary participation in the study. Cases were chosen in order to reflect both the diversity of agricultural crime and the proportional distribution of crime types in Bozkurt. Some farmers didn't want to participate in the study. However, the main factor determining the sample size was a conviction that the data had reached saturation (Saunders et. al., 2018).

Table 1:*Victim farmers and cases*

No.	Type of the incident	Content of the incident	Victims
1	Theft of livestock	Theft of 8 sheep	Ahmet
2	Theft of livestock	Theft of 11 sheep	Bekir Burcu
3	Theft from house	Theft of farm equipment	Cemal
4	Abusing trust	Not getting the straw he paid for	Davut
5	Theft of livestock	Theft of 2 calves	Ender
6	Damage to personal property	Killing a sheepdog	Fatih
7	Damage to personal property	The damage of the stray livestock to the cultivated product in the field	Galip
8	Theft of livestock	Theft of 1 calf	Hasan Hacer
9	Theft from vineyards, gardens and fields	Theft of 7 irrigation pipes from the field	Akın
10	Damage to personal property	Cutting 25 cypress trees in the field	Bayram
11	Trespassing	Putting agricultural equipments on someone else's land without permission	Canan
12	Trespassing	Unauthorised cultivation of the land	Durmuş
13	Trespassing	Unauthorised cultivation of the land	Emre
14	Trespassing	Unauthorised cultivation of the land	Faruk
15	Trespassing	Unauthorised grazing on the land	Gökhan
16	Trespassing	Unauthorised using of the land	Hüsni
17	Damage to personal property	The damage of the stray livestock to the cultivated product in the field	İlhan İpek
18	Theft from house	Stealing the chain of the livestock	Kamil

Each respondent was given a pseudonym, provided in alphabetical order in Table 1. The sample included four female victims. Women in cases 2, 8 and 17 were interviewed with their male spouses, as they jointly experienced the victimisation. Additionally, case 11 consisted of a female farmer. The interviews lasted a duration of 60 to 110 minutes. Interviews with victim couples (cases 2, 8 and 17) lasted longer than single-victim interviews. Interviews generally took place in the location where the victimisation occurred, some of which were in the homes of the victims.

When asked for their consent for the interviews to be audio-recorded, none of the participants agreed, so the method suggested by Chong (2008) in similar situations was used. Within the framework of this method, during the interviews, quick notes were taken, farmers

were asked to repeat what the interviewer missed, the notes were translated into dialogue format immediately after the interview, and farmers were asked to read the dialogue, point out the parts that did not correspond to their narratives and to correct them with the interviewer. Most importantly, farmers were informed before the interview that this process would be requested from them and their consent was obtained. The new interview was not moved on without analysing the approved one. In this way, new situations were discovered before each new interview and so questions were developed (Charmaz, 2014).

Interviews were analysed using the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method (Smith, 2009). IPA allows researchers to understand the individuals' experiences that form their perceptions about a phenomenon. In this process, the researcher reinterprets the experience that the responding individual interprets and verbally provides. The main goal is to look at the phenomenon through the respondent's eyes. This approach allows the researcher to discover the subjective situations that construct each individual's perception of the phenomenon. The results of the research are obtained by revealing, comparing and interpreting the differences and similarities between these situations (Piatkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

In the current study, it was aimed to reveal the farmers' perceptions of the Gendarmerie, the stages of sense-making in the farmers' construction of this perception, and how the agricultural crime victimisation process affects the reconstruction of the farmers' perception. In order to achieve this, the schematic seven-step process of the IPA was used as a guide in the analysis (Charlick, McKellar, Fielder & Pincombe, 2015). Immediately after each interview was transcribed, the transcript was read and notes were taken for each line. This was repeated three or four times in a day and notes for each reading were used to identify themes. After each analysis, different and more targeted questions were added to the interview schedule. An iterative process that involved continued reflection and revisiting of interview responses was required to identify pattern development.

Limitations of this study are primarily attributable to the phenomenological approach and the sample size. Just as the experiences narrated to the researcher are subjective and reconstructed, the researcher's interpretations are also subjective and constructed. So, it is possible that others could come to different conclusions in same topic. Additionally, the sample includes 21 farmers from a single district. Therefore, the results may not generalise to other populations, even elsewhere in Bozkurt. However, these limitations are inherent in IPA.

Results and Discussion

According to phenomenological sociology, knowledge about phenomena are gained by experiencing their meanings. The meanings of phenomena are constructed by the social environment in which individuals grow up. This is an interconnected process from the distant past to the present and ultimately produces the socio-cultural structure that surrounds us. Humans reinterpret phenomena, produce new meanings and construct perceptions about them by blending the uniqueness of self with the possibilities offered by surrounding structure

(Schutz, 1967). Bozkurt farmers begin to construct their perceptions of the Gendarmerie through a similar process. In order to understand this process, farmers' experiences with the gendarmerie are analysed in two different situations, before and after victimisation.

Before victimisation

The narratives of Bozkurt farmers show that their contact with the Gendarmerie begin in their childhood. Emre's words reflect this situation:

When we were kids and worked in the fields in the summer, when my father saw the gendarmeries, he immediately would wave at them. At that time, the Gendarmerie used to patrol on foot more. My father would ask if they need anything. They usually would say no or sometimes just want water. But my father definitely would put a few pieces of things, whatever we have with us, in their bags. The soldiers wouldn't want to take it. When their commander pointed and shook his head as if to say ok, they would take it timidly. When they left, my mother would pray for them. So it's always been like this. My parents would act as if they had seen their own kids. (Emre)

Emre's words show that farmers learn that the gendarme is a soldier and how important the soldier is for the Turkish nation and for their own families. This is most probably a result of Turkish national culture. The Turkish nation is described as an 'army nation' and the mythical saying '*every Turk born a soldier*' reflects this situation (Kinli & Kinli, 2020). Therefore, whilst in countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia the people sees the rural police as only a law enforcement agency working in the countryside (Holmes, Painter & Smith, 2015; Mawby, 2004), the military character and Turkish people's value about army give a different meaning to the Turkish gendarmerie and differentiates it from other examples.

Emre's expressions also show that the Gendarmerie has had a respectable place in the perception of farmers since childhood. This situation is still relevant today. The primary school experience of 17-year-old Ender, the youngest of the farmers interviewed, and the effect of this experience on his future career plans is a pertinent example:

When I was in the third grade of primary school, the traffic gendarmerie came to the school. They explained the traffic rules. Our excitement had started from the moment that our teacher said they would come. We were very happy the day they arrived. They put us in their car. At that moment, I wish to be a gendarme in the future. I'm still longing for that opportunity, I want it so much. (Ender)

Farmers' words show that they grow up in a social environment where the Gendarmerie plays a role in many areas and the contact with the gendarme is quite frequent and natural. It is also recognised in the international literature that these non-enforcement related encounters, which are listed among the principles of community policing, are inherent in rural policing (Wooley & Smith, 2022).

It can be said that Bozkurt farmers have been interacting with the Gendarmerie since their childhood and perceive the Gendarmerie, which has a history in their village long before they were born, as a part of the given social order (Berger and Luckman, 1991). The farmers' following narratives show that they continued to experience the Gendarmerie at various periods of their lives after their first contact.

Experiencing the gendarmerie: The first and most reliable door to the state in countryside

In this section, farmers' experiences of the Gendarmerie is interpreted under the themes of sincerity, accessibility and usefulness, and it is tried to understand how farmers constructed an image of the Gendarmerie in their minds before they were exposed to crime.

Sincerity

The relationship between the Gendarmerie and the villagers in Türkiye can be described as sincere. Sincere means that a folksy and authoritarian Gendarmerie attitude for establishing justice and order and people's pleasure about it. It also involves trust, confidence and respect in the Gendarmerie. Ergün (2021)'s findings support this situation. She found that 83.8 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "The gendarmerie acts justly and impartially towards the public while carrying out its duties". The rate is 95.8 percent for the statement "When I'm a victim of a crime, I go to the gendarmerie station without hesitation" and 96 percent for "I respect the gendarmerie and the job they do". There are similar points in the narratives of Bozkurt farmers.

As it can be understood from Ender's words above, many young men living in rural areas want to become a gendarme. This ensures that a significant part of the Gendarmerie personnel is composed of people who grow in the village. Ahmet states that this situation creates a warm relationship between the gendarmerie and the villagers:

Gendarmerie is warm to people, intertwined with the public. Moreover, most of them are peasant children. (Ahmet)

From Ahmet's words, it is possible to infer that the Gendarmerie personnel are not far from the village culture and therefore can understand the villagers. Mulrooney, Harkness and Nolan (2022), in an Australian context, state that police knowledge of village culture is an important aspect that increases farmers' trust in the police. In accordance with this finding, it can be said that realising that the Gendarmerie understands them, the Bozkurt farmers begin to build their sincerity with the Gendarmerie. However, although village partnership is sufficient for beginning of construction of the sincerity, Ahmet's words show that increasing and maintaining the level requires the authoritarian and fair attitude of the gendarmerie:

They [gendarmes] keep the contact tight. They often come to the coffeehouse. We order tea, most of the time they don't even drink it, saying we're on duty. When the incident happened, I didn't hesitate at all, I immediately called 156 [the Gendarmerie's previous emergency number]. Oh, the Gendarmerie was tougher in our youth. For example, they used to come to the coffeehouse, ask if there was a child under age, whose child it was. They would intervene at that moment. No one would dare to do wrong, everyone would be afraid of. But, it's [the Gendarmerie] very good now though. It's even softer than it should be. (Ahmet)

Because of its military traits, the Gendarmerie has a disciplined structure. The achievement of the task is the first priority and the Gendarmerie does not refrain from using its authority when necessary to achieve the task. This makes crime prevention more efficient and pleases farmers who complain that police are not tough enough on perpetrators of agricultural crime. The findings of Armstrong (2005) that the resurgence of agricultural crime in a border county where the military handed over responsibility to the police in Northern Ireland also support this situation. In addition to this, Ahmet's words show that Bozkurt farmers are sure that the Gendarmerie does not use its authority arbitrarily and for their own benefit. As a result, the sincerity between the Bozkurt farmers and the Gendarmerie is strengthened, and thus the Gendarmerie becomes the first institution to which the farmers can apply without hesitation when they are in trouble. Thereafter farmers begin to experience the accessibility of the Gendarmerie.

Accessibility

Two of the most distinctive and defining features of rural communities are distance and isolation (Woods, 2011). Being remote and isolated makes it difficult for rural residents to access many services. Policing services are among them too (Mawby, 2004), and thus accessibility is a key determinant of the service quality of rural policing. However, the results of previous studies show that rural police are not very good at being accessible (Stassen & Ceccato, 2021).

Owing to the sparse population spread over a wide area, rural residents do not feel the physical presence of the police as much as urban residents. This is a common finding of studies conducted in different countries. Some of the participants of these studies stated that they cannot reach the police and they have almost no contact with the police (Mawby, 2004; Anderson & McCall, 2005; Clack, 2013; Holmes & Jones, 2017). Some participants stated that there are some logical reasons for this situation. Necessity of working in a wide geography with limited personnel and vehicles are the most common reasons that are expressed (Mulrooney et al., 2022).

Although there are some similarities caused by the rural geography, the accessibility of the Turkish Gendarmerie is high and exemplary for other rural policing organisations. The words of İlhan's 70-year-old father show that this has been the case since the past:

Interviewer: How often would the Gendarmerie come in the past?

Father: They used to come sometimes, but not as much as now. They rarely used to come by car, but mostly on foot. Oh, also by horse. In the past, where was the vehicle! Now they always come.

It can be ascertained from these words that, although the method and frequency had changed, the Gendarmerie have always been in the villages. The organisational structure of the Command makes this possible.

The core units of the Turkish Gendarmerie are stations. There are 2,097 gendarmerie stations throughout the country (J.Gn.K.lığı, 2023). Each of these stations have designated responsibility areas and total of these areas constitute the whole of Command's responsible area. This structure of the Turkish Gendarmerie has always made it possible for both the farmers to reach the Gendarmerie and the Gendarmerie to the farmers, in proportion to the technological opportunities offered at the time.

Another factor that increases the accessibility of the Turkish Gendarmerie is its management approach. As Mulrooney et al. (2022) point out, while in many countries rural police only come into direct contact with farmers after an incident has occurred, the institutional culture of the Turkish Gendarmerie makes direct contact with farmers possible at all times. To give an example, it is an issue that the superiors care about and want the personnel working in the gendarmerie stations to frequently visit the villages in their area of responsibility. Therefore, there is no need for a crime to occur for the Gendarmerie patrol to go to the village. Stations patrol their villages on different days and times. This practice makes it easier for farmers to reach the Gendarmerie. Durmuş's statement confirms this:

Gendarmeries are patrolling day and night. They come here a lot. I would like them more to come. It gives me peace. But there are many villages. They have to go everywhere. (Durmuş)

Durmuş's words show that be aware of the presence of the gendarmerie makes the farmers feel safe and peaceful and farmers would like more and more patrols of Gendarmerie. Mulrooney et al. (2022) and Smith and Byrne (2017) found that Australian, English and Welsh farmers felt similarly. Durmuş is aware that the Gendarmerie is trying to reach everywhere in a large rural area, and therefore it is not possible for his wishes to come true. Similarly, farmers in Holmes and Jones's (2017) study note that geography and distance restrict rural policing, no matter how hard they try.

The direct communication channels offered by the Gendarmerie to rural residents also make it very easy and fast for the farmers to reach the Gendarmerie. The telephone number '156' was used for a long time as emergency call number enabling the gendarmerie to be accessed from anywhere in Türkiye. However, with the project that started in 2005 and was implemented throughout the country in 2020, the number '112', which was previously used

only as an ambulance call number, has transformed into a single emergency call number that also includes access to the gendarmerie. Farmers can reach the gendarmerie by calling '112' whenever they need, and they widely use this method:

When we need, we call 156 without any hesitation. Now it's 112. (Kamil)

Besides, the Gendarmerie has always offered ways to reach itself through different methods. Galip talks about the most frequently used of these in the past:

In the past, there were no telephones everywhere. When needed we used to tell the headman and then he would inform the Gendarmerie. (Galip)

Galip's words show that when the rate of having a telephone was very low, the village headmen fulfilled the communication channel duty of the farmers to the Gendarmerie. This method is still practised today, despite the decline. Alternatively, Gökhan's statements show a different communication situation, the cooperation between the Gendarmerie and the farmers and the results of this cooperation:

I also served as headmen for two terms. We worked together with the Gendarmerie. They still call me if anything has happened in the village. The new headman is also my relative. We assist the Gendarmerie. Sometimes they ask someone or let us know if there is a conflict so we can intervene. Sometimes for hostile families, sometimes for abduction of a girl... I'm quite old too. Since villagers listen to my words, gendarmerie makes me a mediator. I have the number of the station commander and other friends [gendarmes]. Whenever needed, we call them. (Gökhan)

This is a rural-specific situation. Since it takes a long time until they reach the remote villages, gendarmes need people they can trust in each village to get information about the incidents, perhaps to take some informal measures or to make some necessary interventions. These people are required to be trusted and respected people in the village. Detection of these people requires the Gendarmerie personnel to visit the villages frequently and to be able to get to know the people living there adequately. During these stages, the degree of sincerity and trust increases between some farmers and the Gendarmerie personnel. As a result, it can be said that the Turkish Gendarmerie is present in all rural areas, wants to be accessible and provides this with its long-standing applications.

Usefulness

Usefulness means farmers benefit from the functions of the Gendarmerie. Clearing up agricultural crimes is the first and most natural function that the farmers expect from the gendarmerie. Having had a sheep stolen in the past, Canan expected the same from the Gendarmerie:

I had reported it to the Gendarmerie. Thankfully, the Gendarmerie found all five thieves. (Canan)

Canan's words show that farmers who experience the successful intervention of the Gendarmerie develop a positive perception. In their study in Australia, Harkness and Larkins (2019) found that farmers who have more contact with the police are more dissatisfied. This is because police contact with farmers only after the crime has occurred and is often unsuccessful to solve the crime. We can conclude that for farmers' satisfaction to increase, a policing approach that is sensitive to agricultural crime and reasonably successful outcomes are needed. Fatih's statements about his very old experience is also indicative of this:

20-25 years ago, it has been quite a while, sheep and goats were stolen in our village. 30-35 livestock of a shepherd named Mustafa were stolen, and also during daylight. The Gendarmerie found the gang. So, according to what we've heard, it was a big gang. We felt comfortable after the gendarmerie caught that gang. God bless the gendarme. Without the Gendarmerie, these gangs would loot everywhere. (Fatih)

Fatih's words show that although many years have passed, farmers do not forget the important incidents illuminated by the Gendarmerie. Each successful intervention of the Gendarmerie in the past allows the farmers to construct a Gendarmerie phenomenon in their own minds that they can trust in need, and reproduce this phenomenon with each new successful intervention.

Another issue in which Bozkurt farmers benefit from the Gendarmerie is the settlement of conflicts:

Interviewer: How does the headman behave in such conflicts?

Akın: The headman is called first. He listens to both sides, then talks to both sides. At the same time, the elders of the village definitely intervene too. But if they can't get results, then the Gendarmerie is called.

Akın's words show that farmers see mediation as one of the functions of the Gendarmerie. They do not hesitate to apply to the Gendarmerie for the solution of the problems that root in bilateral relations, regardless of whether the Gendarmerie is directly in charge of it. In addition, seeing the Gendarmerie as a solution point is not unique to farmers. Officials of public institutions also refer many issues that they have difficulty in solving to the gendarmerie. There is a popular saying about this situation: '*Write it to the Gendarmerie and it will find its place*'. Faruk, who had a field border dispute with his neighbour, experienced a similar situation. When the officer of the institution he applied to could not get out of the problem, he immediately directed him to the Gendarmerie. Faruk did not find it strange, and applied to the Gendarmerie to find a solution to his problem:

Faruk: Then I went to the District Agriculture Directorate. “We can’t solve this, you should go to the Gendarmerie”, said the official. So, I went to the Gendarmerie. This case went to court. Well, I didn’t even go to the court. There were some poplars in the field. The viewing was made in the field. The court divided the land and then gave us a document. Thus, it was laid to rest.

Interviewer: Do they [other institutions’ officials] usually refer you to the Gendarmerie when such things happen?

Faruk: Yeah, they refer to the Gendarmerie.

As a result, the Bozkurt farmers constructed the Gendarmerie in their minds as the first and most reliable door to the state in the countryside. The words of İlhan and his wife İpek explain this situation very clearly:

Interviewer: What does the Gendarmerie mean to you?

İlhan: It has a great meaning. I mean, it solves all the problems.

İpek: If the Gendarmerie don’t exist, the people would go at each other tooth and nail. The hostility would go everywhere.

Interviewer: Do you have any hesitation in calling the Gendarmerie?

İpek: No you, we call and tell it as it is, we’re telling exactly what happened without any lies. They also give an idea, they fairly make our peace. We trust them, we have a lot of confidence. When we give them a bell, they come, God bless them.

A review of the literature reveals that expecting rural police to find solutions to every problem is not unique to Türkiye. Weisheit et al. (1994) stated when the practices presented in the concept of community policing were still new for urban police, the rural police were already burdened with the responsibility of solving many non-criminal problems of the communities in which they were on duty. Jiao (2001) also found that rural residents were more likely than urban and suburban residents to demand problem-oriented policing and solutions to non-criminal problems. Payne, Berg and Sun (2005) have identified the roles expected from police in small towns in the United States under five main headings: (i) law enforcement; (ii) friend; (iii) social work; (iv) dispute resolution; and (v) animal control. The rural police that can fulfil these roles, as İlhan puts it above, become “a real solver to all problems”. Perhaps the main reason why the Turkish Gendarmerie is perceived as so satisfactory by farmers is its ability to meet these demands to a large extent thanks to its strong organisational structure and historical heritage.

After victimisation

Sixteen of the farmers interviewed expressed their satisfaction with the practices of the Gendarmerie after the victimisation, while the remaining five stated they were not satisfied enough. As a result of the process, it was found that satisfied farmers reinforced their positive perceptions of the Gendarmerie, while dissatisfied farmers did not experience a fundamental change in their pre-constructed positive perceptions.

Reinforcing the positive perception about the Gendarmerie: Caring and successful Gendarmerie

Among the cases investigated, there were four livestock thefts. With the exception of one, the other victims express their satisfaction with the Gendarmerie's interest in the incident. The words of Ender illustrate the importance the gendarmerie attaches to the case and its impact on the farmer:

God bless them, they [Gendarmeries] were very helpful. The station commander has arrived. A special team [Crime Scene Investigation Team] also came from Denizli. You know, when they first came, they went far away. There is a mine, you know, they went all the way. Thankfully, the commander helped a lot at that time, he came and patrolled around at night. I mean, he came here a lot at two or three o'clock. They came very often at that time. Normally they come once every three or four days or once a week, but then they came and went every day. (Ender)

Livestock theft is a type of crime that the Turkish Gendarmerie attaches great importance to and Ender's statement shows how seriously the Gendarmerie acted in these cases. The station commander personally handled the case and crime scene investigation team was assigned by the higher command. Intervening in similar cases enables these teams to become competent in the investigation of agricultural crimes. This is a feature not often seen in the rural police of other countries (Anderson & McCall, 2005; Harkness, 2017).

Harkness (2015) found that the lack of personnel specialised in agricultural crime leads to police failure and consequent farmer distrust. Lack of training and knowledge specific to rural crime is one of the reasons why farmers perceive rural police as inadequate (Barclay, 2003; Harkness & Larkins, 2019). Mulrooney et al. (2022) found that while knowing about the existence of special teams and having contact with them increased farmers' trust and satisfaction in the police and their reporting of crimes and reduced their fear of crime, the lack of specialised personnel to ensure this situation was among the issues frequently mentioned by farmers.

Livestock theft is cited as an example here, but the seriousness shown by the Gendarmerie is also valid for other types of incidents that may seem not as serious. The statements of Fatih, who applied to the Gendarmerie because the shepherd dog died of poisoning, are indicative of this:

After all, the gendarmeries came and called the officials of the District Agriculture Directorate. They did an autopsy on the dog, took a sample of the poison. Then the samples were taken to Izmir. One month or one and a half passed, and then the answer came. It has been proven that the dog was poisoned. So, frankly, I didn't expect that the Gendarmerie would do such a deep investigation. They took very good care of the incident. (Fatih)

In addition, sensitivity to prevent secondary victimisation while investigating the case is another factor that reinforces the positive perceptions of the Bozkurt farmers about the Gendarmerie. Burcu's experience is an example of this. The Gendarmerie completed all the procedures at home and Burcu was thus spared secondary victimisation regarding the care of her children:

[Taking statement at home] It was really good. How would I go to the station with the children? We don't have a car. It would be difficult in the village. There is a minibus, but you have to match the time. The children were also very scared. They immediately took my statement here. I have never been to the station. (Burcu)

While the interest shown by the Gendarmerie pleases the farmers, when the successful results are added to this, the positive perception of the farmers is reinforced:

Bekir: I don't know how the Gendarmerie did it, they called me within a week. They had identified the thief and found some of the livestock. Of course, we were very happy. They [gendarmeries] also took care of us. They took us everywhere, God bless.

Interviewer: How did your thoughts about the Gendarmerie change after this incident?

Bekir: Brother, it doesn't change. We have known the Gendarmerie for a long time. This made it even better. Thank God, they didn't leave us alone.

On the other hand, some farmers, who are not able to cover all the damages despite the arrest of the suspects, think that the Gendarmerie does its job, but that other actors of the criminal justice system do not function to support the success of the Gendarmerie:

The Gendarmerie found the thieves and livestock a month later. But, only two of my eight were found. The rest weren't among those found. Thankfully, the Gendarmerie found two of them, but the other six are still missing. The court gave these [thieves] a punishment of so-called payment. They stayed in jail for 7-8 months, then they got out. They were going to pay for six animals in March. Still there is no sound. The Gendarmerie catches him, but there is no penalty. In fact, this is what happens. (Ahmet)

Ahmet's words show that, just as Harkness (2017) found in Australia, Bozkurt farmers are also dissatisfied with court decisions and the leniency to criminals that prevents effective implementation of punishments.

On the other hand, Bozkurt farmers think that even if the Gendarmerie does their best, the conditions in the countryside make it difficult or sometimes impossible for the gendarmerie to solve the incident. Bayram's words are example of this opinion:

Bayram: They [gendarmeries] are doing their duty too. They do whatever they can, within the law. In this incident, if I had not seen the men loading the trees the gendarmerie had nothing to do either. Gendarmerie would ask for evidence. What would I say? The trees have been cut. Who cut it? Sarı Çizmeli Mehmet Ağa (Joe Doakes)!

Interviewer: In such a situation, wouldn't you inform the Gendarmerie?

Bayram: I would. I would take official action, but what would be the result? We wouldn't get anything. How would you know who did it? Nobody sees it here. Here is the out of the village. Who would come across and see?

In comparison with Carcach (2002), Barclay's (2003), Donnermeyer and Barclay's (2005) and Anderson and McCall's (2005) findings that farmers do not report many agricultural crimes to the police because they believe there is not enough evidence, Bayram's words show that reporting to the Gendarmerie has become a habit to a certain extent, even if he thinks that gendarmes do not have enough evidence to solve the case.

Consequently, Bozkurt farmers' narrations show that the interest shown by the Gendarmerie and the successful results achieved in resolving the case reinforce their positive perception of the Gendarmerie. On the other hand, there are also farmers who aren't satisfied with the practices of the Gendarmerie.

Not changing the positive perception about the gendarmerie: Gendarmerie is more than a rural police

Davut is one of those who had an unpleasant experience. Davut is a victim of rural fraud. He pays money to somebody he does not know directly for some straw, but the straw is not sent to him. Despite his efforts, he cannot get the money back. Finally, he seeks a solution by applying to the Gendarmerie, but he is not satisfied with the response of Gendarmerie:

Davut: The commanders in Bozkurt also disgraced me. Is that ever done! I already know my problem. I applied for the official solution. They didn't care much.

Interviewer: So, satisfaction?

Davut: I'm not very satisfied, frankly. I mean, they gave me advice, they gave me advice like I'm a child. Steadily they say, "how could you send money to someone you don't know". Okay, so now I wouldn't send it either, but it just happened to me. I wouldn't want advice. I wanted them to help me but it didn't work.

Davut's experience is in accord with the findings of Barclay (2003) and Anderson and McCall (2005). Barclay (2003) found that victims of livestock theft who reported the crime to the police were often met with a veiled accusation that they were victimised due to their own lack of safety measures. Similarly, some of the farmers who participated in Anderson and McCall's (2005) study reported that they were accused of imprudence and incompetence by the police.

Whilst the Gendarmerie takes seriously the theft of livestock and farmers who are victims of livestock theft are quite happy with the practices of the Gendarmerie, it is not correct to claim that practices create the same satisfaction for all farmers. The case of Hasan and Hacer serves as a useful example:

Gendarmeries [of Acıpayam district] caught thieves in Acıpayam. One of them [the thieves] confesses, to take advantage of remorse law. He says that they took a male from our barn. They [other gendarmeries] ask our [Bozkurt] gendarmerie, "Do you have any stolen calves there?". Our gendarmerie says "no". Our station registered it as lost livestock, not stolen. When the thief says that they bought one from here, other stations' gendarmeries ask again, and it turns out like that. So, our station didn't enter it as theft. We're hurt. I mean, they were interested at the time of the incident, but then they forgot. It wouldn't be obvious that the animal was ours. The gendarmerie should have followed it more seriously. (Hacer)

In this case, farmers state that they were satisfied with the first response of the Gendarmerie, but were not satisfied with their subsequent actions. The main reason for the dissatisfaction of the farmers is that the animal could not be fully replaced despite the fact that it was found:

I was quitting, I swear I almost gave up farming. It doesn't make any money either! The animal lost weight. We sold 5000 liras worth of an animal for 4000 liras. We gave 1000 liras to the road. When we arrive, the commander asks. He will console me too. "How are you, are you happy?". I said, I'm both happy and sad. Surprised, he asked "Why?". I said "A jackal ate one of the legs" [laughing]. Well, the animal went 1000 liras down and 1000 liras went to the truck. 2000 liras gone. (Hasan)

The statement of the farmer shows that the only source of dissatisfaction, perhaps even the main source, is not the Gendarmerie. Farming is a difficult profession and its earnings are decreasing day by day. Agricultural crimes further reduce farmers' earnings (Anderson & McCall, 2005; Mears et al., 2007). Furthermore, farming is more than a job: it

is a lifestyle. Ahmet expresses how farming affects his life with the words “worse than prison”.

Under these circumstances, agricultural crime does not only cause financial harm to farmers, but also physical and psychological harm (Smith & Byrne, 2017). Some farmers leave farming due to the negative financial and psychological effects of being victimised by agricultural crime (Anderson & McCall, 2005). Booth, Briscoe and Powell (2000) found that farming is one of the occupational groups with the highest suicide rate in England and Wales and stated that agricultural crime victimisation has an impact on this situation (Smith & Byrne, 2017). In a more recent study, Smith (2022) found that victimisation of agricultural crime is among the stressors that most negatively affected farmers in the United Kingdom and concluded that if farmers do not receive help on how to combat the effects of these crimes, victimisation of agricultural crime can become one of the main factors causing farmers to leave their businesses. For this reason, the damage suffered by both Hasan and Hacer and their expectations after the news that the livestock was found must be considered within the framework of the difficulties of the general economic situation of farmers. Our example also shows that even if the animal is found, the victim farmers are exposed to serious financial damage. This causes the farmer to feel dissatisfied with the Gendarmerie.

It has become increasingly difficult to meet the expectations of the farmers from the Gendarmerie in the victimisations caused by personal conflicts. Even though this kind of conflicts are often outside the gendarmerie’s direct tasks, farmers generally do not care about the scope of the task of the Gendarmerie. For them, it is the state that must resolve the conflict, and the state is the Gendarmerie. However, their request is not limited to conflict resolution only. Their main desire is resolving the conflict by Gendarmerie in their favour. All the actions of the Gendarmerie that do not lead to this result are insufficient in the eyes of the farmers. The fact that Canan, who had an inheritance dispute with her brothers and was exposed to agricultural crime during the conflict, could not meet her expectations from the Gendarmerie is an example of this situation:

This incident isn’t the only one and not the first. How many times have I gone to the gendarmerie! He [my brother] intends to kill me. He choked me twice. The case is still ongoing. I’m also calling the Gendarmerie, there is one of them, he says, “I’m tired of your job”. I went to the station, but he didn’t take the statement. What else am I going to do? What should I do if I don’t go to the Gendarmerie? (Canan)

The examples show that some farmers experience different processes and dissatisfaction with different issues. However, none of these farmers reported changes in their positive perceptions of the Gendarmerie. The words of Hasan and Hacer, who expressed their dissatisfaction at the highest level, constitute a very meaningful example:

Interviewer: How did the process you go through change your thinking about the Gendarmerie?

Hasan: It hasn't changed! The Gendarmerie is ours. Let it be a cow that goes. Again, the gendarmeries found it. If something happens tomorrow, we will call the station again. Thanks, they come and run for everything. In this incident, we're very impressed and scared.

Hacer: I mean, if we came across the thieves, maybe they would shoot and kill us.

Hasan: It could be, of course. But it's gone now. Last time, the gendarmeries came and asked if we needed something. Our soldiers are invaluable.

Farmers' narrations show that negative experiences create dissatisfaction among them, but it is limited only with those experiences and do not change their positive perceptions about the Gendarmerie. It is possible to say that this situation stems from the positive perception of the Gendarmerie that farmers have construct in their minds since their childhood and that the Gendarmerie means much more than a rural police force for them.

Conclusion

The IPA was specifically chosen for this study because the Turkish farmers' perception of the Turkish Gendarmerie is rooted in the relationship they have had with the Turkish Gendarmerie since their childhood. Therefore, a focus was placed more on how farmers constructed their perceptions of the Gendarmerie in the period before they were exposed to crime. As a result of this analysis, it is argued that the Gendarmerie is one of the most basic objective realities (Berger & Luckman, 1991) of the institutional world in Turkish villages and farmers grow up in a social life environment where the Gendarmerie plays a role in many areas and the contact with the gendarme is quite frequent and natural. In this environment of frequent interaction, they learn that the gendarmeries are soldiers who are respected and loved. As time passes, farmers experience positive features of the gendarmerie such as sincerity, accessibility and usefulness and, as a result, they describe the Gendarmerie as the 'first door to the state in the countryside'.

After being exposed to crime, farmers experience two different situations, but their positive perceptions of the gendarmerie do not change. Contrary to examples in other countries, most of the farmers exposed to crime are satisfied with the Gendarmerie's practices and reinforce their positive perception of the Gendarmerie. Those who are dissatisfied with the Gendarmerie's practices limit their dissatisfaction to the incident they experienced and do not have a change in their positive perceptions of the Gendarmerie. It is possible to say that this situation stems from the positive perception of the Gendarmerie that farmers have construct in their minds since their childhood and that the Gendarmerie means much more than a rural police force for them.

The literature on policing practices and management, like community policing, problem oriented policing, intelligence led policing and so on, generally consists of United States and United Kingdom examples (Newburn, 2008). The theoretical framework of this study is also

based on community policing, but the results show that there are more aspects of rural policing that need to be explored in the international context. Results show that the Turkish Gendarmerie, which blends tradition with modernity, has a *sui generis* law enforcement practice and management style. This can be referred to as a ‘community of practices’, which have not yet been conceptualised and whose institutional and academic principles have not been revealed, ‘towards the folk gendarmaring’. We can be mindful of the words of Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Türkiye: “The Gendarmerie is an army of law that is always devoted to the homeland, nation and republic with love and loyalty, an example of humility, sacrifice and renunciation”. This quotation constitutes the spirit of this understanding. Being able to reveal the principles of this understanding ought to be a central aim of further academic studies.

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