

SOCIAL REFLECTIONS OF CYBER TERRORISM AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE FAMILY: KIRKUK/IRAQ EXAMPLE*

SİBER TERÖRÜN SOSYAL YANSIMALARI VE AİLEYE ETKİSİ: KERKÜK/IRAK ÖRNEĞİ

Hayat Jassim MAJEED** - Sinan YILMAZ***

Abstract

This research examines the results of a survey study conducted to analyze the social repercussions of crimes committed through information technologies and to reveal how these crimes affect family relationships. In the research, a comprehensive scientific method combining theoretical foundations and field analysis was used and the data obtained from Kirkuk province was analyzed by applying a survey technique through a scale prepared by the researchers. The results reveal that the family is directly faced with an advanced digital threat and that society needs to provide a multi-level response to this threat, such as awareness, legal protection and education. The research analyzes a modern phenomenon where technology and social security intersect and provides an in-depth sociological approach by analyzing the data obtained through field research using the survey technique. The research also draws attention to the importance of strengthening families in terms of education in order to cope with cyber terrorism danger and draws attention to the importance of national preventive policies based on partnership between state and society to protect the society against the gradual collapse of the social structure through cyber terrorism.

Keywords: Information crimes, Cyber terrorism, Information society, Digital social networks, Family.

Öz

Bu araştırma, bilgi teknolojileri yoluyla işlenen suçların sosyal yansımalarını analiz etmek ve bu suçların aile içi ilişkilere nasıl etki ettiğini ortaya koymak amacıyla yürütülen bir survey araştırmasının sonuçlarını ele almaktadır. Araştırmada, teorik temeller ile saha analizini birleştiren kapsamlı bir bilimsel yöntem kullanılmış ve araştırmacıların birlikte hazırladıkları bir ölçek aracılığıyla anket tekniği uygulayarak Kerkük vilayetinden elde ettikleri veriler analiz edilmiştir. Elde edilen sonuçlar, ailenin gelişmiş bir dijital tehditle doğrudan karşı karşıya olduğunu ve bu tehdide karşı toplumun farkındalık, yasal koruma ve bilinçli dijital eğitim gibi çok düzeyli bir yanıt vermesi gerektiğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Araştırma, teknoloji ile sosyal güvenliğin kesiştiği modern bir olguyu analiz etmekte, anket tekniği kullanılarak alan araştırması yoluyla elde edilen verileri analiz ederek derinlemesine sosyolojik bir yaklaşım sunmakta, ailelerin dijital tehlikelerle başa çıkabilmeleri için bilgi ve eğitim açısından güçlendirilmesinin önemine dikkat çekmekte ve bilgi terörizmi yoluyla sosyal yapının kademeli çöküşünden korunmak için devlet ve toplum arasında ortaklığa dayalı ulusal önleyici politikaların önemine dikkat çekmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bilişim suçları, Siber terör, Bilgi toplumu, Dijital sosyal ağlar, Aile.

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** Correspondent author, Karabuk University, Graduate Institute. E-mail: hayattarzelu@gmail.com, ORCID: 0009-0000-8537-5511.

*** Prof. Dr., Karabuk University, Department of Sociology. E-mail: sinanyilmaz@karabuk.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0001-9915-8323.

Introduction

Rapid transformations in the world of digital communication have deeply affected social communications and interactions all over the world since the beginning of the 21st century, and leading to rapid social transformations. As a result of these transformations, family life and family relations have also changed, and new types of threats to the family that have never been seen before in history have emerged. One of these types of threats is “cyber terrorism”, which leads to the disruption of social order as a result of the use of digital technology to intimidate, threaten or destroy individuals through methods such as threats, blackmail, spreading gossip or violating privacy (Yılmaz 2012a).

The family, as a social institution, is one of the most vulnerable social units to the effects of this type of terrorism. Because cyber-attacks can penetrate homes unhindered, especially through children, disrupt family relationships, undermine trust between family members, and even increase levels of tension and emotional disconnection among family members. Especially in cases where there is no digital awareness or deterrent laws, anomalies in communication and interaction between individuals can cause rapid social disintegration for the family and society. With information technologies, the concept of terrorism has evolved into a different dimension. Contemporary terrorism is no longer limited to armed violence or physical violence but has taken on covert digital forms such as hate speech, electronic blackmail and information manipulation, targeting the psychological and cultural stability of individuals, all of which pose a direct threat to family life.

This research aims to reveal the hidden social dimensions of these digital crimes and how they affect values, ties and roles within the family. It also tries to understand the effects that children may experience in cases where the family is exposed to an organized electronic threat, such as isolation, fear or the breakdown of relationships. The importance of this study is that it objectively reveals the social effects of cyber terrorism based on local data by revealing the social reality in Iraq, which has a fragile structure especially due to sectarian and ethnic differences, with quantitative data.

In this research, the data collected through field research is analyzed to reveal the social dimensions and effects of cyber terrorism and digital danger on the Iraqi family. The data collected through the survey method analyzes how families interact with this new danger, whether they have social awareness, and whether they have the means to combat and adapt to this danger, etc.

This research was conducted to achieve the following objectives:

1. Identify the most common and most effective types of information technology crimes within families in Iraq.
2. Analyze the social impact of these crimes on family structure, cohesion, and educational role.
3. Reveal the defense and behavioral mechanisms adopted by the family against digital threats.
4. Reveal the level of awareness of the family about the seriousness of cyberspace and information technology crimes and their effects on their children.

Conceptual Framework

The word terrorism literally means fear, terror, anxiety, extreme anxiety or unusual or unexpected threat. In the last thirty years, this term has gained a new meaning and is defined as instilling fear in people by using violence. The person who does this is called a terrorist. An act of terrorism is when a person or group, such as governments, individuals, revolutionary groups or the opposition, uses illegal violence or threats of violence in order to achieve political goals and interests (Yayla, 1990). Terrorism can be defined according to ideological and political interests and the will of the party that benefits from it. This concept is a totalitarian concept dominated by uncertainty and ambiguity. All actions such as legitimate resistance, the right to self-determination, rejection of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes and racism can be described as terrorism. In 1984, the US Department of Justice defined terrorism as a violent crime aimed at influencing the behavior of a government by illegal means (such as assassination or kidnapping). The US Federal Bureau of Investigation defined terrorism as any act of violence that endangers human life and violates the criminal laws of any country. The Encyclopedia of Cultural Theory

defines terrorism as acts of violence against civilians in order to create panic among the population. In short, the use of violence within a particular national or ethnic group in order to achieve a specific political, ideological, economic or religious goal is included in the concept of terrorism (Şahinoğlu, 2015).

Information is one of the central concepts of our digital age and forms the essence of thinking, planning and decision-making. Information can be defined as “data that has been processed and interpreted to make it understandable and usable in different contexts”. Information differs from data in that data are simply symbols or raw numbers, whereas knowledge acquires meaning and value by being associated with a specific context. Information is defined as “a tool that reduces uncertainty and increases the recipient’s level of knowledge”, making it a fundamental element in communication and interaction (Tonta, 1999).

In light of technological developments, information has become a strategic power comparable to economic and political power and is the main driving force of the concept known as the “information society”. UNESCO defines information as “data organized and interpreted within a conceptual framework in order to create information that can be used to make effective decisions”. This definition reflects the functional perspective that information is an effective tool for raising awareness, promoting development, and generating behavioral and cognitive change (Webster 2014).

Cyber terrorism is a concept that has emerged quite recently and has rapidly strengthened its position in the internet field and has become a problem for global security structures. When the purposes of cyber terrorism are examined, it is seen that it aims to destabilize states and societies by mostly targeting the economic structure (Hoo, Goodman & Greenberg, 1997).

Social Reflections of Cyber Terror Crimes on the Family

Family is the environment where a person's material and spiritual balance develops, and any disorder in these factors leads to the deterioration of a person's mental balance and future behavior. One of the most basic functions of the family is to raise healthy individuals and to protect family members from the negative and destructive effects of social anomalies by strengthening important social ties. For this reason, in societies with healthy family ties based on strong foundations, terrorist acts are less common than in fragmented societies. A childhood period devoid of family attention leads to problems such as introversion, impaired physical and mental development, and emotional instability, which generally leads to feelings of hatred towards society. This situation leads them to violence and makes them ready to resort to any kind of violence to get what they want (Gurwitch and others, 2002).

The Role of the Family in Combating with Information Technology Crimes

One of the most fundamental bases for ensuring harmony among individuals in a society and combating all kinds of corruption that disrupts the values of the society and threatens its security is education (Yılmaz, 2012b). Education starts in the family first. Because the family is the fundamental construct of society and has the potential to meet the psychological and spiritual needs of children in a balanced and moderate manner by supporting their physical, mental and emotional development (Bray & Stanton, 2009). Parents need to communicate with their children and keep them under control in order to protect them from cyberterrorism and crime. Children should be taught what they can encounter in daily life and how to distinguish good from bad in words and actions should be explained (Nasution, 2021). Behaviors known as violence or domestic violence within the family should be avoided and children should not be given bad role models. Because violence causes individuals to spread grudges, hatred, fear, idleness, isolation, introversion, perversion, all kinds of crime, immorality, corruption and other undesirable behaviors in society. Domestic violence is one of the most important reasons why children become victims of information technologies and other means of corruption (Hornor, 2005).

Family Factors That Expose Children to Cyber Terrorism

- Deterioration of Emotional Relationships in the Family

The deterioration of psychological and emotional relationships between parents, and even the dominance of psychological tension, hostility, hatred and grudges, will negatively reflect on

children's criminal behaviors, and will also contribute to the child's development of aggression or a tendency to commit crimes. Psychologists believe that emotional cracks within the family are primarily due to oppressive attitudes in the family environment, and especially if the head of the family is inclined to absolute authority in the family, in such families, meeting the material needs of individuals takes priority over meeting their emotional needs, and at the same time, arguments within the family are common and the rights of family members are violated. However, material needs are only a means of meeting emotional needs, and the primary goal of the family should be to prioritize the emotional needs of individuals. The family raises children correctly, teaches them social roles and uses various social control methods to ensure that they adopt correct behaviors. Adopting various moral values, social and legal traditions and customs is an inseparable part of the education that children and young people receive within the family. This requires a family environment dominated by love, compassion and mercy (Brock & Kochanska, 2015).

- **Socio-Economic and Socio-Cultural Level of the Family**

Since the socio-economic and socio-cultural level of the family is highly influential on the methods of raising children, these variables have an important role in the child's life, methods of raising, interactions, behaviors and the development of physical, emotional and mental personality traits. While high-income families provide their children with more resources and educational opportunities and the opportunity to explore the environment, low-income families can have a negative effect, especially if they cannot meet their children's basic needs. The socio-economic level surrounding the child can also hinder his/her development. Various studies have shown that good socio-economic status of the family can basically provide the objective conditions necessary for a healthy upbringing. On the other hand, if families that cannot meet the basic needs of individuals cannot provide sufficient opportunities for their children, this leads to a sense of deprivation and inferiority in children (Shah and others, 2012). An increase in the socio-economic level leads to a flexible and democratic family environment, thus contributing positively to the child's development. Some studies show that the family environment is also affected by the social environment and that there is a significant relationship between the family and environmental effects. The mutual love and friendship between parents are also effective in raising children. Harmony between spouses contributes to the healthy upbringing of children. Stability in spouses helps the child develop a balanced and integrated personality (Ritchie and others, 2005).

- **Education and Cultural Level of Parents**

The level of education of parents affects their competence in fulfilling their roles in the social development process of their children and enables them to be calmer and more tolerant towards them. Parents with a higher level of education give their children more freedom than parents with a lower level of education. In a study examining the attitudes of parents regarding many basic life situations (sleep, nutrition), it was found that there was a clear relationship between the level of education and the behavior of the parents, and that while educated parents showed excessive attention to the basic needs of their children, uneducated parents exhibited harsh behavior and did not pay much attention to the basic needs of their children (Hortaçsu, 1995). Many studies have shown that parents with a lower level of education tend to use harsh and neglectful methods, are less inclined to explain and comment to their children, and that the level of education of the parents can be an important factor in the functional role of the family. This is because the level of education is an indicator of the experiences that the parents have gained throughout their education and daily life (Hortaçsu, 1995; Ardila and others, 2005).

- **Moral and Religious Values of the Family**

Conservative and religious families tend to reinforce the values of religiosity, moral commitment and cultural affiliation in their children. Such families are careful to encourage their children to worship and are seen to question individuals who deviate from religious teachings. On the other hand, liberal families raise their children by freeing them from all kinds of behaviors stemming from religion, tradition and cultural affiliation. Religious families try to create a

religious control mechanism in children and ensure that duties and rights are protected between spouses and between parents and children. In addition, the religiously based moral values that prevail in the family determine how to distinguish right from wrong (Yılmaz, 2012a; Astrachan and others, 2020). Children having high moral values is one of the basic elements and criteria for parents' success in fulfilling their educational duties towards their children. In addition, parents' commitment to religion and their implementation of moral rules are positively reflected in children's behavior and play an important role in the upbringing of their children (Dobbelaere and others, 1999). On the other hand, raising children independently of tradition and cultural affiliation in the name of freedom puts them at risk of being exposed to negative external influences, since their ability to distinguish between good and bad is not fully developed.

- **Relationship Between Siblings**

The relationship between siblings plays an important role in the child's personality development. The relationship between siblings is also closely related to the parents' behavior towards their children. As parents try to treat their children equally and not prefer one to the other, the children's chances of having a healthy personality and emotional balance increase. The child's development is affected by the presence of a brother or sister, the age difference between them, and the social classes of these siblings (Dunn, 2002). The preference of one child over another and the resulting negative behaviors such as selfishness and jealousy affect the child's healthy development. Adler states that the younger sibling feels inadequate towards his/her older sibling and tries to compensate for this inadequacy by showing superiority and success to his/her older siblings (Whiteman and others, 2011). Newcomb, on the other hand, stated that the child's rank among his/her siblings is not an effective factor in the child's personality development, and that the factors affecting this are the parents' different treatment of their children and their discriminatory behaviors. If parents treat their children fairly and do not discriminate between them, the relationship between siblings is characterized by love, affection, and compassion. In contrast, if parents do not treat their children fairly, this is reflected in the relationship between siblings, and competition and hostility arise between siblings. This leads to various forms of violent behavior (Newcomb, 2009).

Cyber Terrorism and Its Impact on Families in Kirkuk City

The use of digital technologies in a malicious or aggressive manner, such as electronic blackmail, spreading rumors, targeting children and young people, or violating privacy to spread fear or threats or to disrupt the social fabric, is referred to as cyber terrorism. With the development of digital technology and the increasing dependence on social media tools, societies all over the world have been faced with the danger of cyber terrorism to a greater or lesser extent. Cyber terrorism deeply affects Iraqi society and the families in Kirkuk, which was selected as the sample in this study, as it affects other societies. The selection of Kirkuk as the sample in the study is due to its ethnic and sectarian diversity and its fragile environment for such threats. Extremist and terrorist groups use digital space to spread provocative messages or sow discord among the components of the local society. The Iraqi Human Rights Commission and a number of civil society organizations have recorded numerous cases of digital violations targeting young people, girls and women through threats or the publication of unauthorized publication of personal photos.¹ These practices create anxiety and psychological pressure in the family, especially when the mother or father is not knowledgeable about digital protection methods or cybersecurity culture. Social experts at Kirkuk University state that such events weaken family ties and in some extreme cases lead to introversion, violence and even suicide (Unicef Iraq report, 2021). Therefore, spreading digital awareness and activating the role of education, religion and security institutions in combating this type of terrorism are of great importance in protecting the family, which is the core of society.

¹ <https://iq.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/103/2024/04/IRAQ-2023-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf>

Kirkuk Province Field Research

In this study descriptive analytical method was used to analyze the social reality of information technology crimes and to investigate the effects of cyber-terrorism crimes on families based on the opinions of Kirkuk province residents through field research.

The research was conducted as field research through a survey technique. A comprehensive survey form measuring different social dimensions of information technology crimes was designed by the researchers and this survey form was distributed to a sample of 400 families selected by simple random sampling method in Kirkuk province. This sample group is at a level that can measure the research universe with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error.

After the data was collected, the data was analyzed with the SPSS V26 program using statistical methods appropriate for the research purposes. Since the research results will be presented at the article level, detailed analyses are not included in the article, and the research results are presented for the benefit of the relevant parties and other researchers by using only the data in the frequency tables.

Findings

Table 1: Gender frequencies of attendees

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	232	58.0
Female	168	42.0
Total	400	100.0

The higher proportion of men than women in the sample may reflect that men have a greater interest or awareness of cybercrime compared to women, or it may be due to the cultural nature of the attendees from whom the data was collected. The research group believes that the influence of families is extremely important in preventing cyberterrorism crimes (Table 2).

Table 2: How likely do you think that young people who are not under the control of their families could be subjected to cyberterrorism crimes?

Answers	Frequency	%Percentage
Little	90	22.5
Medium	87	21.7
Much	223	55.8
Total	400	100.0

The results confirm that the majority of the attendees think that the absence of family supervision increases the risk of young people being exposed to cybercrimes. The rate of those who think that family supervision will be insufficient in preventing children from being exposed to cybercrimes remained at 22.5%. These results reflect the importance of the role of the family in guiding children and protecting them from digital threats. Because young people who are not supervised by elder family members or by parents may be more prone to communicating with suspicious people or being influenced by extremist content. The high rate of those who think that the effect is very high may be related to the increase in cases of young people being trapped over the internet in recent years. The entry of cyberterrorism crimes into our lives is also closely related to the use of technological devices such as computers, tablets, and mobile phones. Young people start using such technological devices before they reach the age of 18 and become vulnerable to cyberterrorism crimes because they are not yet old enough to protect themselves. The research

group's thoughts on the effect of technological developments on the increase in cybercrimes are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: To what extent do you think rapid technological developments have contributed to the increase in cybercrimes?

Answers	Frequency	%Percentage
Little	95	23.7
Medium	93	23.3
Much	212	53.0
Total	400	100.0

The data in the table shows that there is a widespread belief that rapid technological developments contribute to the increase in cybercrimes. Most participants think that these developments make it easier for terrorist groups to use cyberspace to spread their ideas or carry out their operations. This situation shows that there is a growing concern that security measures are not keeping up with technological developments, which paves the way for the spread of cybercrimes.

The age group in which young people who are not yet adults use technological devices intensively is the 13-18 age group. The opinions of the parents who participated in the research regarding the risk of this age group being exposed to cyberterrorism crimes are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Rates of exposure to cyber terrorism crimes among young people aged 13-18

Answers	Frequency	%Percentage
Little	88	22.1
Medium	106	26.5
Much	206	51.5
Total	400	100.0

The results show that the majority of participants think that young people in this age group are highly exposed to cyberterrorism crimes. This may be because this group is highly dependent on the internet and social media and therefore interacts more with digital content that may contain direct or indirect threats. The high rate of those who think the threat is very high may be related to the increasing reports of this age group being targeted by extremist groups, as well as the level of social awareness and consciousness.

The responses of attendees regarding the impact of cyberterrorism crimes on society are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Thoughts of attendees on the Impact of Cyber Terrorism Crimes on Society

Answers	Frequency	%Percentage
Little	108	27.0
Medium	119	29.8
Much	173	43.3
Total	400	100.0

The results show that most attendees believe that cyberterrorism has affected family relationships to varying degrees, causing tensions between family members as a result of excessive use of technology or exposure to harmful content. The high proportion of participants

who perceive the impact as medium to high reflects the existence of real problems such as loss of face-to-face communication and increased social isolation.

The data in Table 6 show that concerns of attendees about the increase in cybercrime are quite high, and many people feel threatened by the widespread use of the internet and the spread of cybercrime.

Table 6: Concerns of attendees about Cyber-Terrorism Crimes

Answers	Frequency	%Percentage
Little	111	27.8
Medium	113	28.3
Much	176	44.1
Total	400	100.0

This concern reflects the increasing awareness of potential risks, especially as digital crime methods develop and perpetrators become more difficult to detect.

With the emergence of cybercrime, the trust problem in people has also increased significantly. Since the most important factors in people's sense of trust towards each other, such as sight, hearing and touch, are not present in the cyber environment, people's ability to correctly analyze their interlocutors is also limited.

The research group's thoughts on the impact of cyber terror crimes on people's trust levels are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Negative Impacts of Cyber Terrorism Crimes on People's Sense of Trust

Answers	Frequency	%Percentage
Little	126	31.5
Medium	135	33.7
Much	139	34.8
Total	400	100.0

The data in the table shows that for most participants the sense of trust levels have decreased due to the increase in cybercrimes. Being exposed to these crimes can cause stress, anxiety and even psychological trauma, affecting individuals' mental health and social relationships.

The research group was asked what role families can play in protecting children from cyberterrorism and the answers are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Thoughts on the Role of Family in Protecting Children from Cyber Terrorism

Answers	Frequency	%Percentage
Little	84	21.0
Medium	148	37.0
Much	168	42.0
Total	400	100.0

The majority of the attendees believe that the family has an important role in protecting children from the dangers of the Internet and educating them about the possible risks. This indicates that parents should take an active role in monitoring their children, who communicate online, inquiring what type of content they are exposed to, and in guiding them to use the Internet safely.

Conclusion

The data obtained from the research show that information technologies affect all areas of our lives, as well as family life and especially the young generation. Social networks established through communication tools such as computers, tablets and phones are an area free of emotions, as in real life. This environment, where there is no emotional evaluation such as seeing, hearing, touching, feeling, etc., brings with it many risks in addition to the advantages and conveniences it brings. This risky environment strengthens virtual social networks while weakening real-life social networks and communication with the social environment. As a result, social yet asocial personality structures are formed on virtual networks. This situation also affects intergenerational communication.

The young generation, who do not have sufficient communication with their parents and who are unable to sense the extent of the danger they face due to lack of sufficient life experience, are at great risk of becoming victims of cybercrimes. It was determined that families in the Iraq/Kirkuk province, where the research was conducted, are largely aware of this danger. Of course, the family alone is not enough to protect children from cyber terrorism. In addition to the work to be done and measures to be taken by the relevant state institutions, the measures to be taken against the risks of cyber terrorism should also be included in education programs. The increasing prevalence of cyber terrorism crimes also damages people's sense of trust. The research results indicated that approximately two-thirds of the participants stated that cyber terrorism crimes, which have entered our lives with information technologies, negatively affect their sense of trust. Approximately three-quarters of the participants stated that they are concerned about cyber terrorism crimes. Again, approximately three-quarters of the participants drew attention to the high rate at which cyber terrorism crimes negatively affect society. Similar rates are also shared in the opinion that rapid technological developments have increased cyber terrorism crimes. Finally, the rate of those who find the risk of young people who are not under the control of their families becoming victims of cyber terrorism crimes constitutes approximately one-fifth of the participants. Although these results are relatively low, they indicate that efforts for social awareness should continue regarding the risks posed by the innovations brought to our lives by information technologies and the danger of cyber terrorism crimes.

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