



Open Access Letter to the Editor

The psychological impact of the devastating earthquake in Türkiye

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Abstract

None.

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There is a wide range of natural phenomena such as floods, storms, hurricanes, typhoons, tornados, volcanic eruptions, forest fires, tsunamis, and lightning. Earthquake is a type of natural disaster that can have a significant adverse effect on people and communities. Turkey was hit by a severe earthquake of magnitude 7.8 on 6 February 2023, followed by multiple aftershocks and a second earthquake of magnitude 7.6 (9 hours after the first earthquake). These two earthquakes were the deadliest to occur in the last century and affected 11 cities in Turkey namely Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, Adıyaman, Malatya, Şanlıurfa, Gaziantep, Osmaniye, Adana, Diyarbakır, Kilis, and Elazığ. Although the affected cities used to play a significant role in industry and commerce in Turkey, they have been suffering from major destruction and turned into ghost towns as a consequence of the earthquakes.

The earthquakes in Turkey resulted in the loss of thousands of lives and the displacement of millions of people. According to recent statistics announced by the Ministry of Interior Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) in Turkey, the earthquakes have resulted in the deaths of over 50,000 individuals, with more than 107 thousand injured in Turkey, as of 31 March 2023 (AFAD, 2023). While the efforts to rescue those under the rubble still continue after the earthquake, the number of deaths and injuries continues to increase day by day.

Due to their sudden and unanticipated nature, earthquakes may lead to different psychological outcomes including helplessness, fear, anxiety, worry, and uncertainty. People, who experience earthquakes, may suffer from a wide range of emotional, physical and cognitive reactions like panic, disbelief, shock, confusion, and sadness. The earthquakes can also manifest their impact in the form of physical symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, sleep disturbances, trembling, pain, nausea, and sweating. A sense of grief and mourning can also occur as a result of loved ones, possessions, and loss of home and business. Additionally, a significant disruption of daily routines and the loss of social support networks increase the likelihood of experiencing a feeling of loneliness, isolation, despair, hopelessness and helplessness, which may in turn lead to a sense of existential crisis and loss of meaning in life. Furthermore, people may experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after an earthquake as a result of adverse experiences that they may have witnessed during the event. In this situation, people with pre-existing mental health problems may be at greater risk of experiencing symptoms of PTSD and other mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and stress after an earthquake. Available evidence also showed that earthquakes led to a situation where people have become increasingly separated from their loved ones, resulting in symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression (Elhaty & Elhadary, 2023).

In the aftermath of the earthquake, individuals and communities may suffer from collective trauma, with long-term negative impacts on well-being and mental health. The psychological and social impact of the

earthquakes that happened in Turkey can be reduced by providing individuals with emotional support, easy access to mental health services, and community-based resources that promote resilience and recovery in the face of adversity. Therefore, it is vital for people to seek psychological and social support from mental health professionals and their communities to deal with the psychological impacts of earthquakes. This will help them to find effective coping strategies to rebuild their new lives with a sense of meaning and purpose. It is important that mental health professionals should provide psychological help to people affected by the earthquake by improving their resiliency ability in order to adapt and cope with adversity, stress, and trauma. Improving the ability to bounce back from negative experiences and setbacks will assist people to recover from stressful situations and move forward with a greater sense of purpose, growth, strength, and well-being. Both online and face-to-face psychological support can be provided to help people overcome the psychological impacts of an earthquake. Online services can be effective for people who may have limited mobility or live in remote areas. Face-to-face support can also be very effective in terms of providing a more personal and intimate experience and may be more suitable for individuals who need more personalised care. Also, families and communities have a responsibility to promote mental health and resilience by providing social networks and building a sense of connectedness and belongingness to people affected by the earthquake. Furthermore, governments should take a vital role by providing access to mental health services, promoting community-building support, and rebuilding infrastructures to contribute to the safety and security of people.

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