

“Rescuers suffer the most from earthquake trauma”

Psychiatrist Dr. Onur Okan Demirci, who stated that people affected by natural disasters such as earthquakes may experience a psychiatric condition called post-traumatic stress disorder, said: “Rescue teams are among the groups most affected by earthquake trauma. Post-traumatic stress disorder is frequently seen in crime scene officials such as search and rescue teams and medical teams that intervene.”

Stating that post-traumatic stress disorder can occur within days and months after an earthquake as well as years after an earthquake, Demirci said, “Psychological assistance processes of the victims should not be limited to days or months. Be alert to the emergence of possible trauma symptoms over the years.”

Listing the symptoms of the trauma, Dr. Demirci said:

“Physical symptoms could be listed such as problems with sleep and appetite, sensitivity to sounds, startle response, introversion, feeling constantly alert, tension, restlessness, constant weakness, unwillingness, malaise, attention and focus problems, night nightmares, distraction, forgetfulness, irritability, irritability, quick temper, impulse control difficulty in experiencing an earthquake, high earthquake anxiety, decrease in work or school success, deterioration in social relations, personality changes, changes in habits, body aches, palpitations, sweating, tremors.”

“EARTHQUAKE AFFECTS NOT ONLY THOSE LIVING THE EARTHQUAKE, BUT ALSO FOLLOWING THE PROCESS”

Psychiatrist Dr. Onur Okan Demirci from Istanbul Gelisim University, who said that even after the earthquake, a deteriorating mental health can be encountered over the years, said: “The people who are most affected by the earthquake trauma are those who have experienced the most severe earthquake, those who are under the dent, and those who have lost their loved ones. The earthquake affects not only those who have experienced the earthquake, but also many who follow and follow this process. Rescue teams are one of the groups most affected by earthquake trauma. Post-traumatic stress disorder is frequently seen in crime scene officials such as search and rescue teams and medical teams that intervene.”

“HIGHLY POSSIBLE FOR TREATMENT WHEN TAKEN SERIOUSLY”

Explaining that the possibility of spontaneous disappearance of post-traumatic stress disorder is quite low unless it is treated, Demirci said: “We must be alert, careful, cautious and open-minded in the face of this situation that affects the quality of life at a serious level. Psychiatric disorders that are often not taken seriously can have serious consequences both individually and socially. This situation, which is highly treatable when taken seriously, can cost many lives when not taken seriously. People with earthquake trauma can be intervened urgently and psychotherapy interventions can be performed in the following period. Earthquake trauma

can be overcome in a much healthier way, especially with psychotherapy methods such as EMDR and Cognitive Behavioral Therapies. The sooner we can accept that the earthquake has serious physical effects as well as serious psychological effects, the better chance we will have to intervene.”

“Women, the elderly, children and the disabled most affected by the earthquake”

Pointing out that the effects of the earthquake on the mental and social well-being of every member of the society should not be ignored, Lect. Mehmet Bařcillar said, “The psychosocial effects of the earthquake on the vulnerable groups of the society such as women, the elderly, children and the disabled can be quite severe”

“EARTHQUAKE DOES NOT ONLY AFFECT THE PEOPLE OF THE REGION”

Stating that the psychosocial effects of the earthquake can emerge after months, Mehmet Bařcillar, lecturer at Istanbul Gelisim University Social Service Department, said: “The earthquake is considered a traumatic event because it causes injuries and deaths as well as feelings such as fear and helplessness. The earthquake threatens not only the people of the region, but also family members who are miles away, loved ones, search and rescue personnel and even the psychosocial well-being of millions of individuals who follow the developments in the earthquake zone at the top of the screens. Although it differs from person to person, emotional and behavioral changes such as fear, sadness, anxiety, helplessness, loss of appetite, forgetfulness, disruption in sleep patterns, abandoning daily routines can occur in individuals after an earthquake.”

WHAT DO THE RESEARCH SAY?

Bařcillar, who gave examples of researches on the well-being of the individual, said:

“In the study conducted with 330 children following the 8.0-magnitude earthquake that took 15,000 people in China in 2008, a diagnosis of anxiety in approximately one out of four children, depression in one out of every six children and post-traumatic stress disorder in one out of every nine children were found. In the study conducted after the 7.0-magnitude earthquake that took 360,000 people in Haiti in 2010, approximately one out of every four people had post-traumatic stress disorder and one out of every three people had depression. In the study conducted with 513 adults living in the region after the 7.9 magnitude earthquake that occurred in Nepal in 2015, 34% of the participants had depression, 33% had anxiety disorder and 20% had dangerous alcohol use.”

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

Emphasizing that the psychosocial effects of the earthquake on the vulnerable groups of the society such as women, the elderly, children and the disabled can be quite severe, Bařcillar said: “On the other hand, since the psychological and social problems related to the trauma

caused by the earthquake can occur months and even years later, psychosocial services are not limited to crisis intervention and needs to be planned. The focus of psychosocial services should undoubtedly be AFAD, Gendarmerie Search and Rescue, fire brigade, other search and rescue personnel and health workers. Besides, it is useful to mention about social assistance. Aid campaigns to Izmir organized all over Turkey. Social workers in the field have a great role to play in order to ensure that in-kind and cash aids reach right holders in line with scientific criteria and to ensure coordination between public institutions and non-governmental organizations.”