



## Letter to Editor

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# WHAT CAN RESEARCH ON EARTHQUAKE SURVIVORS STAYING IN REMOTE AREAS TEACH US? THE IMPACT OF RELOCATION AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE ON MENTAL HEALTH

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Dear Editor,

I would like to contribute to the discussion of the article titled “Analysis of Sociodemographic and Clinical Features of Earthquake Survivors Seeking Treatment at the Psychiatry Outpatient Clinic Following the Kahramanmaraş Earthquakes on February 6, 2023” which was recently published in Ankara Medical Journal.<sup>1</sup> I congratulate the authors for presenting their data on a subject that should always be well-researched in our country for providing beneficial health policies. This cross-sectional study examines the characteristics of 309 earthquake survivors who sought treatment at a psychiatry outpatient clinic in Ankara, a city far from the epicenter, within one month of the Kahramanmaraş earthquake. The study found that acute stress symptoms were prevalent in this group.<sup>1</sup>

The findings of Kamis et al.'s study revealed that all survivors exhibited symptoms of traumatic stress within one month, consistent with previous research.<sup>1-2</sup> Since earthquakes are known to cause serious and long-lasting mental disorders, identifying individuals at risk of developing such disorders is crucial for determining who requires follow-up care and for making evidence-based recommendations. Some of the well-established risk factors such as the severity of the trauma, injury, having been trapped under rubble, loss of close ones, female gender, and lower education were mentioned by the authors.<sup>1-4</sup>

Since Kamis et al.'s study was conducted in Ankara, a city far from the epicenter, I want to highlight relocation as another potential risk factor for prolonged traumatic stress symptoms after disasters. This factor was not addressed in their study. I believe it should be discussed as it may provide a better understanding and accurate interventions in the acute period after disasters leading to protection from the prolongation of traumatic stress. Although limited studies have examined relocation as a predictor of mental disorders, staying in temporary housing has been found to have a more positive impact on mental well-being than staying in container accommodations.<sup>4-5</sup> One study examining the effect of post-earthquake relocation in Ankara after the 1999 Marmara earthquake showed that those who had migrated had higher traumatic stress levels than others who had been temporarily in the earthquake area for a visit.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, temporary housing was found to be protective for depression compared to relocation for older adults.<sup>5</sup> As a result, whether the earthquake survivors migrated to Ankara or stayed temporarily may be one of the determinants of future symptoms, and questioning it may have provided significant information on predicting whether their psychological symptoms tend to continue.

Given that acute stress symptoms often subside spontaneously over time, the resilience of human mental health should not be overlooked.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, scientific health policies are critical for protecting mental health after earthquakes. In conclusion, the impact of strategies, such as relocation, should be better understood to prevent mental disorders after earthquakes. In this context, psychiatrists should not only provide pharmacotherapies

for psychiatric disorders but also participate in teams that prepare interventions to enhance living conditions following earthquakes.

## References

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