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The Essential Role of Early Rehabilitation in Disasters: A Single Center Experience in Türkiye-Syria Earthquake

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Abstract

Disasters can have catastrophic effects on people's physical, mental, and psychosocial status, as well as public health. Many people undoubtedly suffer from short- and long-term disabilities as a result of the disaster once the first shock wears off [1]. Two devastating earthquakes caused extensive damage in southern and central Türkiye and northern and western Syria in February 2023, resulting in thousands of deaths and injuries. It is estimated that approximately 15 million people were affected. Since there is a possibility that people affected by the earthquake will continue their lives with disabilities, it is important to make an early assessment and make preliminary preparations in this respect. With this preparation and rehabilitation carried out in the early period, it is aimed at helping individuals adapt more quickly to both personal and social life and to increase their independence in daily life.

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Given that a large part of Türkiye was affected by the earthquake, victims were first transferred to nearby cities and hospitals in important metropolitan areas such as Ankara and Istanbul. We evaluated the demographic and clinical characteristics and early rehabilitation needs of patients who were inpatients or outpatients at our center in Ankara within the first 2 months of the earthquake and referred to physical medicine and rehabilitation to make the necessary preparations.

It was observed that the majority of the earthquake victims in our center were children and young people. The average age is 27 years (5–60). Almost all of the earthquake victims lost their homes and relatives. Additionally, half of the earthquake victims lost a first-degree relative to the disaster.

Disasters like war, earthquakes, floods, and pandemics inevitably impact people's mental and psychosocial health. There is an undeniable relationship between a person's psychosocial status, social integration, and rehabilitation success. Beyond learning how to deal with loss and injury, the psychological consequences of earthquakes can become enormous obstacles that impede rehabilitation [1].

The majority of patients affected by the disaster (83%), mostly children and teenagers, had multiple injuries (fractures, peripheral nerve injuries, amputations, etc.). All patients need early psychosocial rehabilitation due to both the impact of the disaster and the deaths of their first-degree relatives. The higher number of lower extremity injuries shows that mobility is affected in the early period. Since mobilization is affected in the early period, muscle atrophy will be more common in people who are immobile due to the effects of both trauma and immobilization. Early rehabilitation aims to mobilize people in a shorter time and make them as functionally independent as possible. Situations that may affect their independence in daily living activities are detected early, and necessary precautions are taken. In our own experience, we have seen that assessing earthquake

victims early and determining their rehabilitation needs will reduce disabilities and increase their independence in the long term.

Competing interests. None

Reference

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