

EDITORIAL

Climate change has been one of the most commonly discussed subjects in recent years and taking necessary measures to prevent this problem is an important issue for which the responsibility lies with all countries. Failing to take timely measures will gradually increase the effects of this problem and the situation will become more challenging and complicated for mankind.

Natural disasters are the most significant problem caused by global climate change. The most problematic natural disasters for Turkey include avalanche, hail, landslide, tornado, drought, forest fire, flood, strong wind, storm, thunderbolt, and earthquake.

The 17 August 1999 Izmit earthquake, in which 17,000 people died, 24,000 people were injured, and 130,000 houses were damaged, is one of the most devastating natural disasters Turkey has experienced in more recent times. The Elazığ earthquake and the following avalanche are also among the natural disasters that we have experienced recently. We continue our daily lives having in mind that we may experience another natural disaster again.

It is true that we are always on alert in Turkey, where natural disasters occur frequently. This causes anxiety in us threatening one of our primary needs, the need for safety, and may increase the effect of trauma in case of a natural disaster. Therefore, a risk management including preparations for natural disasters plays an important role in individuals' physical and psychosocial readiness. Such preparations, more clearly, ensuring the safety of the living environment, having plans about what to do in case of a natural disaster, and adequate provision of basic needs are one of the primary factors to establish a sense of safety in people. Learning from the past and addressing problems to be caused by potential natural disasters will particularly ensure a better management of such situations.

Crisis management gains importance after a natural disaster. The most important impacts of natural disasters on humans and other living creatures are, of course, their potentially fatal effects on physical health. Search and rescue operations and the treatment and care of injured people are the issues that should be handled first. For people who survive and recover from shock, basic needs such as shelter or nutrition take the lead in the course of time. If an individual has lost their sense of safety due to their previous concerns regarding possible natural disasters and supposes that their basic needs cannot be met, they may get more selfish, which in turn disrupts coordination that becomes more important during a natural disaster.

Natural disasters may also cause psychological traumas along with physical traumas. Each individual has different feelings and shows different reactions after a trauma. Some people are affected less by natural disasters while others may be more deeply affected. Therefore, individuals and societies that experience natural disasters should be provided with psychosocial and social support as well as physical support. Psychiatric nurses are responsible for identifying the psychosocial problems that have significant effects on individuals, families and societies and making quick interventions in such situations, which are also called social crises.

Predicting the psychosocial problems that may be experienced during a natural disaster in Turkey, the strategy of “increasing psychiatric nurses’ knowledge and experience on natural disasters and individual or mass traumas” has been included in “the mental health promotion and encouragement” objectives of the National Mental Health Action Plan (2011).

The aim of psychosocial support in natural disasters is to mitigate and resolve mild and moderate level mental problems that may develop after an incident and to prevent severer mental problems that may affect the society. As psychiatric nurses, who have a major place among psychiatric care personnel, we should take responsibility in the management of the relevant process and in any interventions during natural disasters, an important problem in Turkey, in order to recognize and treat the mental breakdown symptoms in affected individuals, help them develop positive and promising expectations and objectives for the future and enable them to readapt to their life. We should also know how to act and whom or where to contact in such situations and be prepared for them.

Psychiatric nurses should place primary focus on post-traumatic recovery, and returning to the normal life is significant for recovery. However, each individual has a different routine and experiences a different recovery process. Psychiatric nurses are recommended to discover the activities that will be good for affected individuals and work on them. In addition, working on these individuals' feelings will minimize the potential problems. Again, we should take the responsibility to ensure the recovery of these individuals from their trauma by growing stronger. Moreover, secondary or tertiary traumas may be observed in individuals who do not personally experience the disaster, but witness it or help the affected people. Psychiatric nurses should also provide care for such people.

More importantly, necessary measures should be taken and the effects of disasters should be minimized through the risk management. As psychiatric nurses, knowing how to act in unavoidable and unpredictable situations and taking part in practices for this issue as well as having knowledge and skills that are necessary for interventions to be carried out in clinical environments and on field will guide us when we meet traumatized individuals.

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2. Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Health. National Mental Health Action Plan 2011-2013. Ankara: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Health Publications; 2011. p. 64.