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Research Article

"Our Lives Have Gone" Experiences in and After Kahramanmaraş\Türkiye Earthquake: A Qualitative Research

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What is already known on this topic?

- *When an earthquake is considered in terms of its sudden occurrence and effect on the regular lifeline of the individual, it is one of the critical traumatic events in human life.*
- *This study aimed to examine the experiences and emotions of individuals who experienced the Kahramanmaraş earthquake.*

What this study adds on this topic?

- *The study results are often parallel to acute stress, loss, and grief reactions, and the needs of individuals are the basic principles of psychological first aid.*
- *Considering these points in the psychological first aid that can be provided in other devastating earthquakes or traumatic events that may occur in our country located on fault lines.*

Abstract

AIM: This study aimed to examine the experiences and emotions of individuals who experienced the Kahramanmaraş earthquake.

METHODS: This study's data, which were collected using qualitative research methods, were collected through face-to-face individual interviews between March 20 and March 21, 2023, after the earthquake in Hatay and Diyarbakır. The purposive sample method, one of the purposeful random sampling methods, was used in the research. A total of 35 individuals formed the study's sample. Colaizzi's phenomenological interpretation method was used in the analysis of the data.

RESULTS: The data obtained from the individual interviews with the participants were gathered under three main themes: earthquake moment, emotions, and after the earthquake. In the study, it was determined that the participants stated that they were terrified by the noise and shaking at the time of the earthquake; they could not go out immediately, it was cold when they went out, and they witnessed that everywhere was dark and destroyed. It was determined that the emotions experienced by the participants were anger, helplessness, guilt, hope, and hopelessness, and they expressed their needs after the earthquake, the difficulties in getting help, and the losses they experienced.

CONCLUSION: Remarkably, the study results are often parallel to acute stress, loss, and grief reactions, and the needs of individuals are the basic principles of psychological first aid.

Keywords: Earthquakes, grief reactions, loss, qualitative research, trauma

Introduction

Earthquakes, tremors, and seismicity are seismic fluctuations that occur due to unexpected energy in the earth's crust, resulting in waves that shake the earth. The magnitude of an earthquake is determined by the Moment Magnitude Scale, or the Richter Scale, as it used to be called. According to this scale, earthquakes of magnitude and below are usually not felt, while earthquakes of magnitude and above can be devastating (Edemen et al., 2023). Türkiye has experienced many devastating earthquakes and is on earthquake lines (Arslanlı et al., 2024). On Monday, February 6, 2023, at 04:17, an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.7 occurred in the Pazarcık district of Kahramanmaraş\Türkiye province and eleven regions in the eastern, southeastern, and Mediterranean regions of the country, including Gaziantep, Sanliurfa, Diyarbakir, Adana, Adıyaman, Osmaniye, Hatay, Kilis, Malatya, and Elazig, with Kahramanmaraş being the most affected. According to official figures, 50 399 people died in the quake, and 1 971 589 individuals were evacuated. In the provinces with 13 852 aftershocks, there were many losses of life and property, and this earthquake is considered the biggest disaster in Türkiye (AFAD, 2023; Arslanlı et al., 2024; Sert et al., 2024).

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Disasters are events caused by natural, technological, and human-induced factors that result in physical, social, and economic losses for people and negatively affect communities by interrupting human activities and everyday life (Edemen et al., 2023; Sert et al., 2024; Ural et al., 2024). The earthquake is considered in terms of its sudden occurrence and effect on the regular lifeline of the individual; it is among the critical traumatic events in human life. Traumatic events threaten and disrupt human life's integrity (Zhou et al., 2020). Although earthquakes often occur within seconds or minutes, their traumatic effects last longer due to the loss of life and property (Yin et al., 2019). While acute stress symptoms caused by earthquakes sometimes resolve spontaneously in the first few days (Uğur et al., 2021), sometimes their traces can last for years and generations (Canel & Balcı, 2018). In addition, even if the traumatic effect of the earthquake is not visible at the beginning, it may occur in the future (Kurt & Gülbahçe, 2019). Individuals who are frequently exposed to earthquakes may experience panic, anxiety, depressive symptoms (Baral & Bhagawati, 2019), feelings of hopelessness, unhappiness, fear, helplessness, and anger. Individuals may experience the earthquake repeatedly, avoid triggers during the day, experience increased arousal, or experience difficulties performing daily activities by reliving this moment in their dreams (Yun & Choi, 2022; Uğur et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2020). Individuals undergo psychologically complex processes due to losing their relatives, jobs, shelter, social support, and uncertainty in the earthquake. These individuals may sometimes experience sleep disturbances or somatic symptoms, feel guilty for staying alive, and neglect their care (Baral & Bhagawati, 2019). In this situation, psychological first aid is the first intervention for individuals in disasters and traumas such as earthquakes (Yun & Choi, 2022; Cheng et al., 2019).

The moment of the event and the first few days aftermath is the process in which the most devastating images are seen, and, unfortunately, psychological first aid cannot be adequately provided. While aftershocks may persist in the area, basic principles of psychological first aid should continue to be applied. For this reason, individuals should be interviewed to share their experiences as much as they want, but they should not be forced to do so. In straightforward sentences, the possible feelings and symptoms should be explained, how to deal with this process, and in which cases treatment is required. Individuals at risk for mental disorders should be followed closely, and appropriate intervention programs should be utilized. However, the limited number of psychological first aid programs or guides structured for disasters such as earthquakes in the literature is a significant shortcoming (Yun & Choi, 2022; Özyer & Dinçer, 2020). Therefore, working on these issues is essential in preparing high-evidence programs and initiatives.

Due to the disaster experienced in Türkiye, it is vital to examine the emotions and experiences of individuals from an early period when the memory is still fresh. Accordingly, this study aimed to examine the experiences and emotions of individuals who experienced the Kahramanmaraş earthquake.

Research Question

1. What are the experiences and emotions of individuals who experienced the Kahramanmaraş earthquake?

Study Design

This study used a qualitative research type and (phenomenological) design since it aimed to examine earthquake victims' emotions, thoughts, and experiences. Content analysis was conducted according to SRQR (Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research) guidelines (Brien et al., 2014).

Sample

Research data were collected face-to-face between March 20 and March 23, 2023, after the earthquake in Hatay and Diyarbakır.

The purposive sampling method was used in the research. Since the qualitative research design is a flexible research design in which the sample size can be decided in line with the research question and purpose, it is stated that the termination of the sample is also a criterion when the data start to repeat; in other words, when the data reach saturation (Corben, 1999). Accordingly, in this study, data collection was terminated when it was thought that data saturation was achieved when the results were repeated in individual in-depth interviews. A total of 35 individuals formed the study sample. Because of the nature of the disaster environment, some participants could not mention their feelings and experiences as much as others, and some could not find a suitable environment for long interaction and interviews. That is why the study was completed with 35 participants.

Among the sampling inclusion criteria, the criteria of being in cities such as Hatay, Adıyaman, etc., where the most destruction and death occurred during the Kahramanmaraş earthquake, being 18 years old and over, and agreeing to participate in the study, were determined. The entire selected sample was interviewed.

Data Collection

After written consent was obtained from the participants for audio recording the individual interviews, in-depth interviews were conducted by an academic psychiatric nurse researcher (F.G.), who had experience in qualitative studies and individual in-depth interviews. The researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with individuals who agreed to participate in the study and met the inclusion criteria. Then, interviews were conducted in safe tends and empty areas. Only the researcher and the participant were allowed to be alone in the areas or tents. Participants were told they could leave the study and terminate the interview if they did not want to continue. Each interview lasted for an average of 15–30 minutes.

Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection using the form prepared by the researchers in the study.

Data Collection Tools

Semi-Structured Interview Form: The first part of this form included the sociodemographic data of the individuals. In this section, fundamental questions about the age, gender, and educational status of individuals were included. The questions in the form were asked and filled in by the interviewer in the individual interview. Then, the central part of the interview, the

second part, was conducted. In the second part, in the form of five questions, answers were sought for two primary research questions. These were as follows: What happened on the night of the Kahramanmaraş earthquake and after it? How did the individuals who experienced the Kahramanmaraş earthquake feel? The form was not, and the questions were not changed after the interviews.

Rigor

To achieve the reliability and trustworthiness of this study, two psychiatric and mental health nurses carried out data analysis, and it was a collaborative analysis. Two researchers are associate professors, and they were trained in qualitative research and have experience in in-depth individual and focus group interview techniques. Furthermore, both researchers have been trained in psychodrama and psychodynamic psychotherapy. They also have experience as members of the Turkish Psychiatric Nurses Association board. Reflexivity was enhanced by illustrating the results with original data and leaving researchers' thoughts—finally, getting the feedback from participants and participants' statements. In qualitative research, validity is the researcher's observation and reflection of the phenomenon as unbiased as possible. Therefore, participant confirmation is essential for the validity of the study. After writing the theme and sub-themes, the results were sent to the participants for feedback, and they were asked to confirm the themes and sub-themes obtained by e-mail. Only 5 of the 35 participants had returned with confirmation and approval; five confirmed the results. Participants confirmed the findings by comparing their experiences and did not recommend adjustments.

Ethical Consideration

Ethics committee approval was obtained from the Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee of Fenerbahçe University with the date 16.03.2023 and number E-88813803-204.01.07-18180 to conduct the study. Since the study was a field study, no institutional permission was obtained from any institution. Verbal and written consent was obtained from earthquake survivors before participating in the study, and the interview was recorded on audio. The first researcher also explained that they could withdraw participation at any point if they felt overwhelmed. After each interview, the researcher informed them that they could receive free psychosocial services and allowed them to show their emotional response.

Statistical Analysis

The data analysis was carried out manually, and no program was used for coding and analysis. This study used Colaizzi's phenomenological interpretation method to analyze the data (Colaizzi, 1978). The steps of Collaizi's phenomenological data analysis were followed as follows. First, the transcriptions were read repetitively to understand the meanings attributed to the phenomenon and the emotions experienced. Then, essential statements that are directly related to the cases were selected. By examining these important expressions, codes were created. A total of 212 codes were identified. The codes were grouped into sub-themes and themes (Table 1). The results obtained are combined with rich and extensive life experiences. The basic conceptual structure of the case was defined. Quotations from participants are given in the order of participants and abbreviated as P to ensure the confidentiality of the participants.

Results

Characteristics of Participants

Table 2 presents the characteristics of the participants. Most of the participants are women and university graduates (Table 1).

Content Analysis

The data obtained after the individual interviews with the participants were gathered under three main themes: earthquake moment, emotions, and after the earthquake. Under the central theme of "earthquake moment," the sub-themes were determined as shaking, fear, going out, and cold since the individuals expressed the strong shaking experienced during the earthquake, the fear they experienced, the moment they left the house, and the weather were cold and rainy. When the "emotions" experienced by the participants were examined, it was determined that they experienced despair, guilt, anger, and longing apart from fear. The participants said that they were terrified on the night of the earthquake; they felt helpless and guilty because they could not be with their relatives. They were angry at those responsible for the destruction of buildings and the death of people. They expressed their hope and despair under the sub-theme of hope that they missed their cities, old lives, houses, rooms, beds, and the people they lost. Under the third central theme, "after the earthquake," the participants expressed their needs and late assistance after the earthquake. In the sub-theme of losses, the participants expressed the loss of life, material, and moral losses, or relatives they could not reach (Table 3).

Earthquake Moment

The participants stated that they were mostly asleep at the time of the earthquake; they woke up with a jolt and did not understand what was happening at first. The participants waited for the earthquake to pass, but it did not pass; they tried to throw themselves out, the things collapsed at that time, and they could hardly throw themselves out. The participants said that it was freezing and raining that night, and because they went out desperately, they waited in the rain and in the cold, in slippers, and thin pajamas. They emphasized that they realized how the city collapsed when the morning lights illuminated the dark city as the electricity went out. Under this theme, the sub-themes of shaking, fear, going out, and cold were determined.

Shaking

Participants stated that they could not initially understand the earthquake. At the same time, they were asleep, but the shaking they felt was mighty, waking them up and quickly causing their belongings or houses to collapse within a minute. They stated that the shaking and the noise were also extreme, and they could not create the triangle of life they had planned before. One of the participants stated that the shaking continued one

Table 1.
Theme, Sub-Themes, and Codes Obtained from the Study

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes	n
Earthquake moment	Fear	1. Fear of death 2. Fear of losing loved ones 3. Fear of never going back to the old days 4. Fear of never seeing anyone again 5. Fear of the roof falling on them 6. Fear of the walls collapsing 7. Fear of not being able to go outside 8. Fear of freezing to death 9. Fear of not hearing from loved ones 10. Fear of the dark 11. Fear of the cold 12. Fear of the tsunami 13. Fear of hell 14. Fear of nightmares 15. Fear 16. Fear of losing children 17. Fear of getting hurt 18. Fear of bleeding 19. Fear of screaming 20. Fear of the body falling apart 21. Fear of the end of the world	21
	Shaking	1. Continuous shaking 2. Like a cradle 3. Like swinging 4. The ground was shaking 5. Tremor 6. Continuous aftershocks 7. Falling in the tremor 8. Falling on the table 9. The coat rack falling 10. The cupboard falling 11. The door locked from the tremor 12. Broke 13. Violent shaking 14. The sound of the tremor 15. The sound of objects moving 16. The chandelier shook 17. The windows broke 18. It threw the person 19. Cracked 20. The walls fell	20
	Going out	1. Going out the door 2. Opening the door 3. Going down the stairs 4. Trying to go out 5. Stairs 6. Neighbors 7. Leaving the house 8. Woke up 9. Don't let the neighbors out	9
	Cold	1. Cold weather 2. Wind 3. Rain 4. Winter 5. Cold 6. Chilling 7. The greenhouse 8. Sheltering in the car 9. Sheltering in the cafe 10. Queue for fuel 11. Shivering 12. Can't sleep because of the cold 13. Getting wet because of the rain 14. Bare feet 15. Coat 16. Stove 17. Blanket 18. Heavy rain 19. Staying in the cold	19

(*Continued*)

Table 1.
Theme, Sub-Themes, and Codes Obtained from the Study (Continued)

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes	n
Emotions	Despair	1. Helplessness in the face of death 2. Helplessness in the face of loss 3. Helplessness in the face of not being able to protect the family 4. Helplessness in the face of an earthquake 5. Helplessness in the face of cold 6. Helplessness in the face of a power outage 7. Helplessness in the face of alienation 8. Living in an unknown city 9. Helplessness in being trapped in rubble 10. Helplessness in the face of destruction 11. Helplessness in not being able to help others 12. Helplessness in the face of phone lines being cut 13. Helplessness in the face of pain 14. Helplessness in the face of longing 15. Not being able to bring back the one who is gone 16. Not being able to speak 17. Not knowing what to do 18. Words fail 19. The magnitude of the pain 20. The magnitude of the loss 21. Everything is over 22. Not being able to protect your children 23. Not being able to leave your house 24. Not having a home to go to 25. Being shocked 26. Being tied 27. The world end 28. Not being able to get any news from those in the wreckage	28
	Guilt	1. Guilt for being alive 2. Guilt for the dead 3. Guilt for not being able to protect her child 4. Guilt for wishing they had died together 5. Guilt for saying thank you 6. Guilt for not being able to do anything	6
	Anger	1. Anger at the earthquake 2. Anger at the loss 3. Anger at the dead 4. Anger at God 5. Anger at the destruction 6. Anger at the telephone companies 7. Anger at the power outage 8. Anger at the cold 9. Anger at the destruction 10. Anger at the darkness 11. Anger at the rain 12. Anger at the contractors 13. Anger at the help that didn't come 14. Anger at the land	14
	Longing	1. Longing for home 2. Longing for mother 3. Longing for father 4. Longing for sibling 5. Longing for cousin 6. Longing for a friend 7. Longing for loved ones 8. Longing for workplace 9. Longing for neighborhood 10. Longing for old life 11. Longing for family 12. Longing for socks 13. Longing for garden 14. Longing for balcony 15. Longing for pajamas 16. Longing for room 17. Longing for order 18. Longing for a warm environment 19. Longing for a safe place 20. Longing for sleep 21. Longing	21

(*Continued*)

Table 1.
Theme, Sub-Themes, and Codes Obtained from the Study (Continued)

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes	n
	Hope	1. The hope of returning home 2. The hope of returning to your city 3. The hope of returning to your neighborhood 4. Spring will come 5. Flowers will bloom	5
After the earthquake	Needs	1. Water 2. Medicine 3. Hot food 4. Diaper 5. Shelter 6. Family 7. Love 8. Warm place 9. Clothing 10. Bed 11. Sleep 12. Transportation 13. Internet 14. Electricity 15. Tea 16. Coffee 17. Bathroom 18. Toilet 19. Rest 20. Slippers 21. Shoes 22. Shovel 23. Generator 24. Cutting-piercing tool 25. Tent	25
	Aid	1. Water aid 2. Medicine aid 3. Hospital aid 4. Ambulance aid 5. Assistance in removing debris 6. Opening telephone lines 7. Removing bodies 8. Collecting limbs 9. Burying bodies 10. Returning children to their families 11. Support for shelter 12. Food aid 13. Heating aid 14. Tent aid 15. Transportation aid	15
	Losses	1. Loss of mother 2. Loss of father 3. Loss of sibling 4. Loss of relative 5. Loss of neighbor 6. Loss of teacher 7. Loss of friend 8. Loss of house 9. Loss of organ 10. Loss of leg 11. Loss of road 12. Loss of cousin 13. Loss of aunt 14. Loss of bride 15. Loss of communication 16. Loss of trust 17. Loss of car 18. Loss of keys 19. Loss of bed 20. Loss of relationships 21. Loss of jewelry 22. Loss of money 23. Loss of refrigerator 24. Loss of notebooks-books 25. Loss of Internet computer 26. Loss of television 27. Loss of quilt 28. Loss of others 29. Loss of pets	29

Table 2.
Characteristics of Participants (N=35)

Characteristics		
Sex	n	%
Female	31	88.58
Male	4	11.42
Age	Mean	Min-Max
	32.77	18-65
Education	N	%
Literate	1	2.88
Primary school	2	5.71
High school	7	20
Bachelor	24	67.44
Master	1	2.88
Wrecking		
No	35	100
Loss of relative		
Yes	25	71.43
No	10	28.57
Loss of residence		
Yes, broken	22	62.85
Moderate damaged	8	22.85
Slightly damaged	4	11.42
No	1	2.88
Migration		
Yes	13	45.71
No	22	62.86
Say intent		
A week	9	25.71
4-6 weeks	26	74.28
Stay in container		
Yes	2	5.76
No	33	94.24
Physical inquiry		
No	35	100

after another and that they had difficulty creating a safe area and getting out even after the tremor was over.

> *I woke up shaking and staggered towards the bedroom, the living triangle area we had determined before, without making a sound. My wife and little son were there. I noticed there was a lot of noise there. The drawers were open and making much noise. The rail cabinet was shaking excessively. When I told my wife that the cupboard door might fall on us, the door came apart. I grabbed the cover before it fell on us and took it to a safe place. Then I called the other kids. They came too. Then there was the*

Table 3.
Theme and Sub-Themes Obtained from the Study

Theme and Sub-Themes			
Themes	**Earthquake Moment**	**Emotions**	**After the Earthquake**
Sub-themes	Shaking (n = 35) Fear (n = 35) Going out (n = 33) Cold (n = 35)	Despair (n = 29) Guilt (n = 22) Anger (n = 28) Longing (n = 31) Hope (n = 6)	Needs (n = 35) Aid (n = 28) Losses (n = 31)

second concussion. We cleaned up the broken glass, sent the children ahead, and left. (p. 19)

Fear

All participants expressed that they were terrified when the earthquake did not end, the drawers opened, and the cabinets began to collapse. They emphasized that they had never experienced this fear before, that the participants heard such intense sounds of collapse, that they heard people screaming and shouting, and that they remembered that night was terrible. One participant expressed his fear of his children as follows:

We thought it was an aftershock. We rushed to the children's room and immediately took a fetal position, but we saw that the earthquake got stronger, and the walls fell on us. My wife and I tried to keep our calm. My three children were panicked; we were so scared that I could not explain. It was destroyed everywhere. There was shouting, shouting, voices from all sides. All the neighbors were trying to get down. During the earthquake, the electricity was cut off. It was raining outside, too; the children were in their pajamas. (p. 5)

Going Out

Participants stated that after the shock of the earthquake, they went out into the ruins, shouting in darkness and the weather was freezing. Earthquake survivors, who realized the magnitude of the event when they went out, stated that they often took shelter in places such as a cafe or car wash on the ground floor of their homes that night. While one of the participants stated that he could not believe that he could ever go out, he believed that everything was over; another participant stated that he was caught in an earthquake while he was awake to drink water before the earthquake and that they tried to wake up first his parents and then all the neighbors, and then their house was destroyed.

I woke up to drink water five minutes before the earthquake. At that time, there was an earthquake. I woke my mom and dad. I was relaxed but nervous when I woke up my parents. Then we tried to wake up the whole apartment with our neighbor, and we got out of the apartment safely and saw the houses collapsed. I supported and advised the crying women and the elderly around. (p. 8)

Cold

All of the participants stated that they rushed out to the streets with their lives, that they did not wear a coat, that they went out with their pajamas and slippers, some even without their slippers, and that the weather was both rainy and freezing that night and they were freezing. One of the participants explained that he had anxiety that night, took medicine, slept, and woke up with an earthquake, barefooted in mud, and their house was destroyed outside.

I was very bored on the night of the earthquake. I took sleeping pills and slept. Then, at four in the morning, I opened my eyes for no reason and looked up at the ceiling, but I did not realize we were shaking. Then my mother took my brothers, woke me up, hugged us all, and went to the garden opposite the house. It was pouring rain, and none of us had slippers on our feet. It was freezing that night. We sobered up and saw the building collapse with our feet in the mud. (p. 12)

Emotions

Under this theme, the emotions experienced by the participants were summarized. The participants felt they despaired because they could do nothing and lost everything: guilt for surviving, not dying, and not being able to help their loved ones. When they realized their anger and loss toward those responsible for this situation, they stated that they longed to look to the future with hope despite all that had happened, while another group stated that their hopes had dwindled.

Desperate

Most of the participants stated that they felt helpless during and after the earthquake. Participants whose families and relatives were under the rubble stated that they could not reach them; search and rescue teams did not come; they could not do anything because they did not have search and rescue vehicles, and they had never felt so helpless. Notably, the participants who lost their relatives, who were trying to reach their relatives under the rubble, and who wanted to retrieve their bodies stated that the rescue teams primarily turned to the debris that made noise, and they felt even more helpless. One of the participants stated that he waited for his mother to be pulled out from under the rubble for days, that his mother could faint even if she did not make a sound, and that he even asked for help from the cook on the street because he could not get her out, and expressed his helplessness with the following sentences:

Our family was trying to reach my father, but he was two floors down. No, they said it was impossible. No one was around to ask for help; they were helpless because everyone was in the same situation. My husband, uncles, and brother-in-law began digging into the sound mobilized because time was running out. Ten hours later, we immediately reached my father by our means and took him to the hospital. But still no sound from my mother. She was sleeping in the same place as my father. Slowly, relief teams arrived, but no one was helping us. "Is there a sound?" they went and looked. When they heard no sound, they left. They said that the one who gives the voice is the priority, but I consoled myself that my mother could not be heard or she passed out. For the first two days, I asked for help from everyone I saw in uniform. On the second day, in the evening, the staff of a municipality were walking down

our street. I asked for help, "We are the cooks," they said, "We will help," they said. My brothers and I started digging at their own expense and said they saw my mother's lifeless body through a hole. The world collapsed on us; we thought we should at least take out her lifeless body. It was evening, and they said it was dark all around, and they had no materials. "We support you," we said. We supplied shovels, generators, cutting tools, and whatever we found. On the third day, my brothers, my husband, and the team found my mother's lifeless body with the items we found. (p. 15)

Guilty

Another emotion experienced by the participants was guilt. Some participants expressed guilt about surviving and not dying. Many participants who lost loved ones felt guilty about surviving; they stated that they could not save them or that they heard the voices of the people trapped under the wreckage were heard, the participants could not do anything, and they experienced guilt. One participant summarized this situation as follows.

The only emotion I felt was fear ... Fear of losing my children was so strong ... I wondered what the safest place would be if we were trapped under the rubble ... I remember shouting to my husband, "Bring my son, just because my son was not with me ... It took a long time ... Everything broke and spilled, I understood from the sounds ... I never thought that I could go down the stairs ... We went down with my daughter on my lap. As my daughter used to say, "I wish it were a nightmare, Mom." but it was not ... It was the full truth of life ... Then ... Furthermore, when I was safe, I thought of the people I loved ... It was important to try to reach them, hear their voices, and know they were fine ... Then, "How are you?" to everyone who asks, "Thank God we are alive." I felt the shame and guilt of saying. (p. 2)

Anger

The participants stated that they were angry at the moment and after the earthquake. They were angry with the contractors who built the houses because of the demolition, and they were also angry that the aid teams did not come for the people who were under the rubble after the earthquake. They said that in the beginning, there were voices from the wreckage, that the voices got quieter over time, and that they were angry because they could not do anything.

I felt anger. What I feel is deep anger. If I were to rate this anger, it decreased to ten at the beginning of the earthquake and seven afterward. I have reasons behind this anger. One, I am pissed off at the greed of the contractors. Two, I am pissed at the late help. Three worries, stress, excitement took out anger in me, and then fear. (p. 4)

Longing

Some participants said they stayed outside after the earthquake, while others stated they took shelter with their relatives and in their homes. These participants jointly expressed that they longed for their old lives, houses, rooms, beds, and even their clothes and now want to return to them. Some participants, on the other hand, expressed their longing for their cities, their country, their losses, mothers, people, and their belongings and losses.

The comfort of our home, my children wanting their rooms ... We want our order very much. We are experiencing financial and moral difficulties. We want a house of our own, a system of our own. We have nothing left of us. Even the socks we wear are foreign to us; we are foreign to this city. May Allah give you everything about us. Let us end this nightmare as soon as possible. Let us get back to our old order. (p. 1)

Hope

Some participants stated that despite all these experiences, they still have hope and will rebuild their destroyed houses and cities. One of the participants, who said that they would not leave the places where they live, compared this situation to the flowering of trees in spring and expressed that nature gives them a message.

Today, I received a photo of my house from my hometown. The plum tree in front of our house tells a lot ... "I did not give up blooming. It would help if you did not give up on what is in our nature," it says. The disaster is devastating, and we are ahead of spring ... We will spend it like a plum tree. We will re-establish our country. I believe we have this power, this will, friend. (p. 8)

After the Earthquake

Under this theme, sub-themes of needs, aid, and losses were determined. The participants stated that they needed many things after the earthquake and were waiting for help to get their relatives out and rescue them. They indicated that they became aware of their losses after the quake.

Needs

While some participants needed a warm and safe place, a long sleep, a bath, and a clean toilet after the earthquake, some stated they needed those moments erased from their memories. One participant said he needed butter on hot bread; another said he just needed his family. Some participants stated they needed to hear from their relatives after freeing themselves from the building. They could not reach them because of the lack of charging and electricity, or the telephone operators were not working. Expressing that even the basic needs are luxurious and the place to stay is cold, the participant emphasized that they should be together with the family.

After the earthquake, I wanted shelter with the family. Everything would be all right if I went to them; we would be safe. That's what happened. I went to the village; we stayed in the greenhouse for four days. It was freezing at night. We were trembling, trying to sleep. The coats, the duvets, the blankets, and the stove had no effect. On the fourth day, we came to Istanbul for my children. The first thing we did as soon as we arrived was to bathe. We were both tired and covered in dust and filth. The need for a

> *bathroom and toilet was a luxury; we couldn't do it in the greenhouse.* (p. 1)

One participant, who needed basic necessities and a relief team to remove the people in the wreckage, stated that he only ate food to live and was ashamed of living.

> *The teams were most needed for the people left in the wreckage. There shouldn't have been so few rescue teams. We needed a charger as there was no electricity. We needed water. To the clothes because our clothes got wet … After a few days, to shower and clean underwear … No one felt like eating; we were eating to survive, but we were guilty that we were alive.* (p. 35)

Aid

Most participants stated that the help came too late after the earthquake, and their relatives, acquaintances, or people under the rubble could not reach them. One participant stated that he was able to get his relatives out of the rubble after 8 days and that he lived for 3 days, but help did not come as follows:

> *Apartment is toppling around on his right, and an apartment is overturning on his left. Our hands are tied; we are trying to save our lives. Eight days after the wreckage, we find our relatives, spouses, and friends dead and carried, which proves that they survived for three days despite our findings. This is more of a pain … Most people had a voice under the rubble on the first and second day … We found our dead with our efforts; no one came, no one helped.* (p. 11)

Losses

Participants expressed their relatives' loss and the financial losses they experienced under this sub-theme. They especially stated that they lost their culture, geography, history, life, friends, friendships, and childhood.

> *"Our life is gone." When I said, "You are alive, you are alive," people around me replied. Those who answer need to understand more about what we are going through. No. We have no life. We have no memories. We have no childhood. There are no streets where we grew up. We have no friends. There is nothing we dreamed about, so our life despaired.* (p. 25)

> *I felt very helpless; I have never felt so helpless. I have never been this desperate. I lost my father at a very young age, but I believed that there could be no greater pain than this pain. … We lost them all in 84 seconds.* (p. 34)

Discussion

In this study that aimed to examine the experiences and emotions of individuals who experienced the Kahramanmaraş earthquake, the participants stated their experiences under three main themes: earthquake moment, emotions, and after the earthquake. In the first main theme, "earthquake moment," the participants mentioned that they were terrified by the shaking and noise experienced during the earthquake; they were able to go out under difficult conditions and it was freezing that night. Similarly, in a qualitative study conducted by Canel and Balcı (2018), it was determined that the participants defined *earthquakes* as disaster, destruction, damage, shaking, shaking, doom, death, loss of life, cries for help, noise, and sound (Canel & Balcı, 2018). In the study conducted by Babahan and Güler (2024), the individuals participating in the study defined the earthquake as a combination of intense auditory stimuli, darkness, cold, and mortality. Cınar et al. (2023) similarly defined the earthquake as a loud noise and shaking terrifying an apocalypse, a nightmare, and a known fact. The study results are similar to other qualitative studies on the Kahramanmaraş earthquake. The Kahramanmaraş earthquake brought together almost all negative factors: early hours of the morning, challenging seasonal conditions, and heavy destruction.

In the current study, the "emotions" experienced by the participants were examined, other than fear, desperation, guilt, anger, longing, hope, and hopelessness were determined. The emotional effects of encountering the reality of death can occur intensely in individuals who have experienced an earthquake (Canel & Balcı, 2018). Ural et al., in their study of women affected by the 2024 earthquake, determined that women experienced feelings of helplessness, fear, loneliness, and inadequacy. In the study conducted by Babahan and Güler (2024), individuals who participated described experiencing intense fear, helplessness, guilt, and victimization. Very intense negative emotions were determined, being caught unprepared despite being expected, terrifying, uncontrollable, and destructive. Anger and helplessness were exacerbated by the inability to get help in the face of suffering, and individuals experienced longing and hopelessness due to the losses experienced. These are among the usual feelings given to extraordinary situations (Yıldız et al., 2023). Similarly, it has been reported in the literature that traumatized individuals experience feelings of anger, loss, mourning, helplessness, guilt, hope, a sense of death, and incompleteness/incompleteness (Fimiani et al., 2022; Gümüş & Deniz, 2020). Sert et al. (2024) found that earthquake victims were still in shock at the interview and could not accept the loss of their relatives or homes. As aftershocks continued, they felt stress and anxiety, and their psychological needs became more apparent. It is thought that the great destruction and losses in the earthquake area and tens of thousands of aftershocks experienced after the earthquake prevent the fear of earthquakes from extinguishing in individuals and cause hopelessness (Takeda, 2015; Tate et al., 2013).

This study determined the third central theme as "after-earthquake." This theme expressed needs, materials, and morals after the earthquake, late aid, and loss of life. The main elements of psychological first aid are the needs conveyed by the participants in this study. These are the need for a clean, warm, and safe place, providing needs such as toilets, bathrooms, and meals, feeling safe for themselves and their relatives, and meeting the needs of getting news and information from their relatives (Özyer & Dinçer, 2020). The needs of individuals may differ in the early and late periods of an earthquake. In the study conducted by Sert et al. (2024), it was determined that earthquake

victims needed tents, hot food, clean water, and heating in the early period of the earthquake; these needs were not distributed fairly, coordination was not provided, and they were not sufficiently cared for. In their study, Ural et al. (2024) also stated that aid was not distributed fairly. In the study by Cınar et al. (2023), earthquake victims expressed that they had a problem receiving their basic needs and did not receive support in the first days following the earthquake. The inability to meet these needs was similar to the current study conducted in our country's early period of the Kahramanmaraş earthquake. Undoubtedly, due to the vast geography affected by the earthquake, especially in the early period, aid could not be coordinated quickly, and some regions accessed aid late. However, local and general governments and authorities must be prepared for earthquakes and coordinate aid for physical and mental health. Despite the earthquakes experienced after the Kahramanmaraş earthquake and the Marmara, Elazığ, and Van earthquakes, it has been revealed that our country's preparations are not sufficient. The suddenness of the earthquake, its uncontrollable magnitude, and the inability to receive help after it may affect individuals' fundamental sense of trust.

In the current study, individuals experienced mourning due to their losses after the earthquake. Sert et al. (2024), in their study, also stated that the relatives of earthquake victims lost their lives under the rubble, that this situation negatively affected their homes and themselves, and that they needed psychosocial support. Ergin et al. (2024), in their study, determined that those who lost their relatives, experienced financial losses, whose homes were destroyed, or who received/considered receiving psychological support had higher trauma scores. Cınar et al. (2023) focused on migration and psychological and social changes after the earthquake. The mourning processes of individuals who experienced loss after an earthquake can sometimes be longer or more complex. This situation can sometimes lead to the formation of mental disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, or anxiety disorders (Yıldız et al., 2023; Sert et al., 2024). For this reason, helping individuals who mourn the earthquake to meet their physical needs, allowing them to experience their grief and their feelings, ensuring that they can share with their social support and continue their routine, giving information about people or services that can help individuals is among the mourning initiatives recommended in the literature (Yıldız et al., 2023; Cankardaş & Sofuoğlu, 2019). For this reason, psychological first aid and psychosocial support studies should be carried out in the earthquake area, and individuals at risk should be followed for a long time (Yıldız et al., 2023).

Study Limitations

The data obtained from this study are limited to the experiences of the individuals interviewed. Due to the nature of qualitative studies, the results cannot be generalized. On the other hand, since the purposeful sampling method was used in the current study, it will likely provide an opportunity to present the phenomenon under investigation in depth. In addition, the difference in the number of women and men and the fact that the number of women is more significant than that of men is another limitation of this study. The fact that the study was conducted in the early period after the Kahramanmaraş earthquake offers scientific evidence for the psychological needs and interventions in this period.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Notably, the study's findings are often parallel to acute stress, loss, and grief reactions, and the needs of individuals are the basic principles of psychological first aid. Considering these points in the psychological first aid that can be provided in other devastating earthquakes or traumatic events that may occur in our country located on fault lines, it may be recommended to establish culture-specific structured earthquake psychological first aid programs.

Data Availability Statement: Data from this study could share upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

Ethics Committee Approval: Ethics committee approval was received from the Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee of Fenerbahçe University (Approval no: E-88813803-204.01.07-18180, Date: March 16, 2023).

Informed Consent: Verbal informed consent was obtained from participants who agreed to take part in the study.

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