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The Unsolved Psychological Consequences of Earthquake Aftershocks in Kermanshah City, November 2017

Dear Editor,

Natural disasters such as storms, floods, and earthquakes are inevitable events that sometimes create acute problems in countries across the globe.^[1] On November 12, a terrible earthquake, measuring 7.3 on the Richter scale, occurred near Kermanshah center causing significant financial losses and casualties. In nearby cities, such as Kermanshah, with a population of 1.5 million, people were overwhelmingly worried. A more serious problem was the frequent aftershocks that caused the people's fears to be fixed after that the major event. This forced them to be constantly on the streets and be disturbed regarding academic, occupational, and social life. The repetition of aftershocks resulted in the process of people's grief be more complicated and remain unresolved.^[2]

Grief is defined as being away from the state of health and well-being. According to Kubler-Ross, the process of grief involves five stages: shock and denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.^[3] When a fatal event occurs only once, the process of grief and mourning follows the normal procedure of solution. In case of repetition of disaster, the process of solving the problem is not natural. Repeated aftershocks during the first month after the event result in people constantly caught in the first three stages of Kubler-Ross model. Because of the inability to anticipate future aftershocks, people were involved in anticipatory grief, that is, the occurrence of a reaction before inevitable loss.^[4]

As Kermanshah city was not the focus of the earthquake and devastation, the mental problems of the people were not considered by any organization. In such a situation, intervention in crisis should be focused on ensuring people's mental security. Helping to solve anticipatory grief, providing appropriate solutions to increase safety from future earthquakes, teaching emotional control methods, and emphasizing support-oriented treatment methods by psychologists may possibly be effective in controlling the psychological consequences of similar events in future.^[5] Therefore, we recommend that if such events are repeated in the country, specialized psychological interventions^[5] and social work services^[1] should be designed based on the types of grief. Such interventions may be more effective in restoring psychosocial security to the public.

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Conflicts of interest

Nothing to declare.

**Behzad Heydarpour¹, Ali Soroush²,
Mozhgan Saeidi¹, Saeid Komasi³**

¹Cardiac Rehabilitation Center, Imam Ali Hospital, Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Kermanshah, Iran, ²Lifestyle Modification Research Center, Imam Reza Hospital, Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Kermanshah, Iran, ³Clinical Research Development Center, Imam Reza Hospital, Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Kermanshah, Iran

Address for correspondence:

Dr. Saeid Komasi,
Clinical Research Development Center, Imam Reza Hospital,
Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Kermanshah, Iran.
E-mail: s_komasi63@yahoo.com

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