

**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF EARTHQUAKE EXPERIENCES:
THE CASE OF THE FEBRUARY 6, 2023 MARAŞ EARTHQUAKE¹**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the experiences of individuals who survived the Maraş earthquake on February 6, 2023, employing a phenomenological approach to examine the multifaceted effects of the disaster. Structured interviews were conducted with 16 participants (eight women and eight men) who relocated to Bolu temporarily or permanently following the earthquake. As one of Turkey's most catastrophic seismic events, it has resulted in significant physical destruction and profound psychological and social ramifications. The majority of survivors perceived the earthquake as a form of "punishment" or "warning," interpreting it through scientific, religious, and conspiratorial frameworks. They experienced intense fear, helplessness, guilt, and a sense of victimization, recounting the event as a combination of intense auditory stimuli, darkness, cold, and mortality. The earthquake significantly altered their perspective on life, leading to increased maturity, religiosity, and heightened awareness regarding the transience of existence. Social relationships were also affected by the earthquake, with some survivors withdrawing from relatives and close acquaintances, while others formed stronger interpersonal bonds. This study underscores the complex nature of the earthquake experience, emphasizing that survivors' needs extend beyond physical reconstruction to encompass psychological, social, and economic support. Limitations include the small sample size and the geographic focus on the province of Bolu. Future research should expand to larger, more diverse populations, and consider the long-term effects of such traumatic events. These findings are critical for developing effective post-earthquake interventions and support strategies that address the comprehensive needs of survivors.

Keywords: Maraş Earthquake, earthquake experience, earthquake survivors, essence of experience, phenomenology.

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DEPREM DENEYİMLERİ ÜZERİNE FENOMENOLOJİK BİR ARAŞTIRMA: 6 ŞUBAT 2023 MARAŞ DEPREMİ ÖRNEĞİ

Öz

Bu çalışma, 6 Şubat 2023 Maraş depreminden sağ kurtulan bireylerin deneyimlerini, felaketin çok yönlü etkilerini anlamak için fenomenolojik bir yaklaşım kullanarak araştırmaktadır. Görüşmeler, depremden sonra geçici veya kalıcı olarak Bolu'ya taşınan 16 katılımcı (8 kadın ve 8 erkek) ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Türkiye'nin en yıkıcı sismik olaylarından biri olan bu deprem, büyük fiziksel yıkımlara ve derin psikolojik ve sosyal sonuçlara yol açmıştır. Depremden kurtulanlar depremi genellikle bir "ceza" ya da "uyarı" olarak algılamış, bilimsel, dini ve komplocu merceklerle yorumlamışlardır. Bu kişiler yoğun bir korku, çaresizlik, suçluluk ve mağduriyet duygusu yaşamışlar ve olayı yoğun işitsel uyarılar, karanlık, soğuk ve ölümlülüğün bir kombinasyonu olarak anlatmışlardır. Deprem hayata bakış açılarını önemli ölçüde değiştirerek olgunlaşma, dindarlık ve varoluşun geçiciliğine ilişkin farkındalıklarının artmasına yol açmıştır. Depremden sosyal ilişkiler de etkilenmiş, hayatta kalanlardan bazıları akrabalarından ve yakın tanıdıklarından uzaklaşırken, diğerleri daha güçlü kişilerarası bağlar kurmuştur. Çalışma, deprem deneyiminin karmaşık doğasının altını çizmekte ve afetzedelerin ihtiyaçlarının fiziksel yeniden yapılanmanın ötesine geçerek psikolojik, sosyal ve ekonomik desteği de içerdiğini vurgulamaktadır. Örneklemin küçük olması ve coğrafi olarak Bolu iline odaklanması çalışmanın sınırlılıkları arasındadır. Gelecekteki araştırmalar daha geniş ve daha çeşitli popülasyonları kapsamalı ve bu tür travmatik olayların uzun vadeli etkilerini göz önünde bulundurmalıdır. Bu bulgular, deprem sonrası hayatta kalanların kapsamlı ihtiyaçlarını ele alan daha etkili müdahale ve destek stratejilerinin geliştirilmesi açısından kritik önem taşımaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Maraş depremi, deprem deneyimi, depremzede, deneyimin özü, fenomenoloji.

A. Introduction

Throughout human history, natural disasters have exerted a profound impact on communities and individuals, resulting in not only physical destruction of infrastructure but also significant alterations in social relationships, existential perspectives, and future outlooks. In this context, earthquakes, characterized by their sudden and unpredictable nature, induce traumatic experiences in individuals, disrupt daily routines, and compel contemplation of existential questions. The February 6, 2023, Earthquake, with its epicenter in Kahramanmaraş (Maraş) and affecting 10 additional provinces, including Hatay, Osmaniye, Adıyaman, Diyarbakır, Şanlıurfa, Gaziantep, Kilis, Adana, Malatya, and Elazığ, has been documented as one of the most catastrophic natural disasters in Turkey's history. The initial major destruction from this seismic event occurred in the early morning hours of February 6, registering a magnitude of 7.8 on the Richter scale. Subsequent tremors of varying intensities persisted throughout the day, culminating in a second major tremor at noon, measuring 7.5 in magnitude, which resulted in the collapse of the majority of remaining structures (Laleoğlu, 2023). According to official statistics, 53,537 individuals lost their lives, 107,213 sustained injuries, hundreds of thousands were rendered homeless, and the earthquake precipitated significant collective trauma (Abatay, 2024).

In addition to the physical destruction caused by the earthquake, the psychological and social impacts on earthquake survivors are substantial. Individuals experience distress due to the loss of loved ones, the instability resulting from the loss of shelter and societal order, and apprehension regarding future prospects. Consequently, comprehending earthquake experiences is crucial for accurately identifying earthquake survivors' needs and developing efficacious support mechanisms.

This study aims to examine the earthquake experiences of individuals who survived the Maraş earthquake on February 6, 2023, utilizing a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is a philosophical approach and research methodology that seeks to understand the essence of an individual's experience. This investigation focuses on questions such as how earthquake survivors perceive the earthquake, how they define it, how they experience it emotionally, how they are evaluated, how they recall it, and how they interpret it. In this context, the study first provides information on the methodology employed in the research, followed by a review of the literature. These findings have been analyzed in detail. Finally, the conclusions are presented, including a discussion of the results.

B. Method

This study employed phenomenological research techniques to investigate the experiences of individuals who survived the Maraş earthquake on February 6, 2023. In this study, the phenomenological approach, a qualitative research design technique, was employed to examine the experiences of individuals who survived the February 6, 2023 Maraş earthquake. Phenomenology is a philosophical approach and research methodology utilized to examine the subjective dimensions of an individual's experiences. Phenomenology initially emerged as a philosophical methodology utilized to examine the subjective aspects of individual experiential phenomena. This approach emphasizes understanding how individuals perceive, interpret, and experience the world. In the field of sociology, phenomenology aims to comprehend social events and phenomena through individuals' experiences. By focusing on individuals' worlds of meaning and elucidating their experiences, this approach facilitates the evaluation of how social reality is constructed and shared. Phenomenological research typically employs qualitative data collection techniques such as in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 2010; Neuman, 2020; Schutz, 2011; Schutz, 2018; Ferguson, 2006; Waldenfels, 2008).

To investigate the subjective dimensions of earthquake experience in this study, structured interviews were conducted. The participants were queried regarding their perception of the earthquake; their definitions, emotional responses, comprehension, and justifications; their discussions with others; how they were evaluated; and their current recollections. The participants' responses were subjected to thematic analysis to identify common themes and meanings associated with their earthquake experiences. In this context, themes, categories, and codes were developed based on the interview data in accordance with the research objectives and questions. To ensure validity and reliability in qualitative research, triangulation was conducted by subjecting the transcribed interview data to multiple analytical perspectives (Işık et al., 2019).

The primary contribution of the phenomenological approach to this study lies in its capacity to enable earthquake survivors to articulate their experiences using their own words. This approach facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the earthquake's significance within individual and social contexts, thereby yielding valuable insights for the development of more efficacious support services for earthquake survivors.

However, this phenomenological approach exhibited several limitations. Notably, as this approach emphasizes the subjectivity of individuals' experiences, the generalizability of the findings may be constrained. Furthermore, the researcher's biases and assumptions may have influenced the data collection and analysis processes. Consequently, in phenomenological research, investigators should prioritize reflexivity and maintain awareness of their own biases (Creswell 2013; Moustakas 2010; Neuman 2020; Schutz 2011; Schutz 2018; Ferguson 2006; Waldenfels 2008).

In this investigation, several measures were implemented to mitigate the limitations of the phenomenological approach. To enhance the representativeness of the findings to a broader population, participants with diverse sociodemographic characteristics were selected. Furthermore, the involvement of multiple researchers in the data analysis process was intended to minimize the influence of subjective interpretations.

In this context, the objective of the study is to elucidate how individuals experienced the Maraş-centered earthquake on February 6, 2023, and to ascertain the "essence" of their earthquake experiences. To achieve this aim, the following research questions, which form the foundation of the phenomenological approach and qualitative research design, were addressed throughout the investigation:

- How do individuals who experienced the Maraş-centered earthquake perceive the seismic event?
- How do they conceptualize the earthquake?
- What were their emotional and psychological responses during and after the earthquake?
- How do they interpret and ascribe meaning to the earthquake?
- How do they communicate their experiences of the earthquake to others?
- How were they perceived and evaluated by others during and after the earthquake?
- How do they recollect and process memories of the earthquake?

The study participants comprised individuals who experienced the earthquake in their respective provinces of residence and subsequently relocated to Bolu, either temporarily or permanently, following the seismic event. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University Human Research Ethics Committee in Social Sciences on 10/13/2023, with decision number 2023/07 and protocol number 2023/358.

To access the earthquake survivors who had relocated to Bolu, initial contact was made with the Bolu Provincial Directorate of Family and Social Services. However, they indicated that all records pertaining to the earthquake survivors were maintained by the Bolu Provincial Directorate of Youth and Sports. This was due to the fact that upon their arrival in Bolu, all survivors were initially accommodated in the student dormitories of the Credit Dormitories Institution (KYK), which operates under the jurisdiction and management of the aforementioned directorate. Upon contacting the Provincial Youth and Sports Directorate, they reported that immediately following the earthquake, 357 families, totaling 1514 individuals, were accommodated in the dormitories. However, due to the commencement of the Autumn semester at the university and the arrival of students from other provinces, the earthquake survivors were subsequently required to vacate the dormitories. The Directorate no longer maintained contact with these individuals. Consequently, they directed us to the Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (AFAD) of Bolu Province for the relevant data and provided a list of 22 families, comprising 69 individuals, whom AFAD officials believed were still residing in Bolu. As the telephone number of one representative from each household was recorded on the list, all individuals were contacted. Some declined participation in the interview due to their reluctance to revisit the earthquake experience, others reported having relocated to their places of origin, and a number of individuals could not be reached via their provided telephone numbers.

A total of 16 individuals, comprising eight women and eight men, consented to participate in interviews from the designated list. The interviews were conducted between August 29, 2023, and September 15, 2023, with an average duration of 60 minutes per participant. A structured in-depth interview technique was employed as the data collection technique within the framework of the phenomenological approach, a qualitative research design. Following the fieldwork, the researchers allowed a period of time to elapse before analyzing the data, in order to mitigate potential biases.

Conversely, several challenges were encountered during the research process. The primary difficulty in the field was the absence of a defined population, as previously noted, along with obstacles in conducting participant interviews. During the interviews, participants' recollections of the earthquake elicited emotional responses, and some interviews were punctuated by displays of distress.

This process presented significant challenges for both the participants and the researchers. The researchers reported experiencing a profound emotional impact, likening it to having "experienced the earthquake of earthquakes" following the completion of the interviews. Consequently, despite the requirement

for "bracketing" oneself in phenomenological research, the researchers occasionally encountered difficulties in maintaining emotional distance from the participants. This phenomenon was observed not only during fieldwork but also during the data analysis process. Specifically, the researchers were significantly affected by the realization that the narratives of earthquake victims, their losses, and their profound experiences of pain would be reduced to individual codes, potentially oversimplifying their complex nature.

Consequently, this study effectively employed phenomenological research approach to elucidate the subjective dimensions of earthquake experiences. This approach enables earthquake survivors to articulate their experiences in their own words, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the earthquake's significance within the realm of individual and societal meaning.

C. Literature Review

Numerous academic studies have investigated the effects of earthquakes on individuals and society in Turkey. These investigations have addressed the psychological, social, and economic impacts of earthquakes across various dimensions. Regarding the psychological effects, research has indicated that earthquakes can induce psychological disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety (e.g., Karabacak-Çelik, 2023; Uğur et al., 2021, Ülker et al., 2023; İkizer et al., 2020; Karacaoğlu et al., 2024). With respect to social impacts, studies have demonstrated that earthquakes can enhance social solidarity while simultaneously precipitating social exclusion, discrimination, and conflict (e.g., Çaki, 2022; Fırat, 2022; Doğulu et al., 2020; Duruel et al., 2023; İnce, 2022; Özceylan et al., 2012; Kasapoğlu et al., 2001; Kümbetoğlu et al., 2007). Concerning economic impacts, research has emphasized that earthquakes can jeopardize the economic security of individuals by generating issues such as increased public expenditure, unemployment, loss of income, and poverty (e.g., Akar, 2013; Eğılmez, 2023a; Eğılmez, 2023b; Parin et al., 2020; Demirci, 2020; Özceylan et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, with regard to the specific application of a phenomenological approach to investigate the experiences of earthquake survivors, it can be posited that the number of studies in the extant literature remains limited, despite a gradual increase in recent years. Although the earliest study employing phenomenology with earthquake survivors was Rehorick's (1986) investigation of individuals' earthquake experiences in Canada, several phenomenological studies have subsequently been conducted on earthquake experiences in other countries (e.g., Green, 2018; Tauba et al., 2020; Zakaria et al., 2021; Djuhardi et al., 2023), the majority of which comprise studies conducted with survivors of various earthquakes in Turkey in recent years. Among these studies, Balcı (2016) conducted research with participants who survived the 1999 Düzce earthquake, Yumbul et al. (2018) investigated survivors of the 2011 Van earthquake, Yıldırım et al. (2023) and Aslan et al. (2023) examined survivors of the 2020 Izmir earthquake, and Gündüz (2024) focused on earthquake survivors from various cities.

It is noteworthy that the 2023 Maraş earthquake appears to have prompted numerous researchers to conduct phenomenological studies, albeit with diverse themes and participant profiles. Within this context, among the phenomenological studies specifically focused on survivors of the 2023 Maraş earthquake, Ulum (2023) examined the earthquake experiences of pre-service EFL teachers; Başkale et al. (2024) investigated the experiences of adolescents; Erduran-Tekin (2024) and Yarımkaya et al. (2024) explored the experiences of parents with disabled children; Ural et al. (2024) analyzed the experiences of women; and Bayhan et al. (2023), Okan et al. (2023), Candemir et al. (2024), Güler et al. (2024), and Karacaoğlu et al. (2024) investigated the experiences of adults from various cities.

Upon conducting a comprehensive evaluation of these studies, it is evident that the researchers primarily originated from the disciplines of educational sciences, guidance and psychological counseling, psychology, psychiatry, and health sciences. Within this context, their primary objective was to investigate participants' earthquake experiences, specifically examining their psychological states, emotional responses,

perceptions of life and mortality, future outlook, coping mechanisms for life's challenges, and concerns regarding the well-being of loved ones in the aftermath of the earthquake.

Regarding the findings of those studies, survivors of the Maraş 2023 earthquake experienced intense fear and panic during the event, which was frequently characterized metaphorically as an "apocalypse" accompanied by sounds of howling, explosions, and structural collapses. The reactions included being trapped under debris, experiencing helplessness, shock, and engaging in prayer. The aftermath presented significant challenges, including inadequate coordination of aid efforts, difficulties in securing shelter and essential resources, and profound loss of relatives. These adversities pose considerable physical and psychological challenges and post-traumatic disorders such as anxiety, depression, fear of death, and bereavement, particularly for vulnerable populations including adolescents, women, and individuals with disabilities.

The coping mechanisms of survivors are diverse and multifaceted. Social support plays a crucial role in the adaptation process, with survivors relying on familial and social networks, mutual assistance, and broader community connections. Spirituality has also emerged as a significant coping resource, aiding individuals in finding meaning and internal equilibrium amidst adversity. Themes of future-oriented optimism, collective solidarity, and emotional transformation were central to the survivors' narratives, demonstrating their resilience and capacity for post-traumatic growth. These studies underscore the importance of coordinated assistance, social support systems, and addressing specific needs, particularly for vulnerable populations, to enhance the resilience and recovery of earthquake survivors.

In contrast to the psychological perspective that predominates in these studies, this research aims to comprehend the subjective dimension of the earthquake experience within the framework of social and cultural contexts. Specifically, it examines how earthquake survivors interpret the earthquake, how they rationalize it, how they discuss it with others, and how the earthquake imparts meaning to their lives and relationships within the context of internalized social and cultural codes and themes, utilizing a phenomenological approach. This study, as an endeavor to address the limitations of the field, was conducted to comprehensively examine the significance of the earthquake within the context of individual and social meaning by enabling earthquake survivors to articulate their experiences in their own words regarding the Maraş earthquake of February 6, thereby facilitating an understanding of "[the] interplay of man and society, of [individual] biography and [social] history, of self and world," as Mills emphasized in his seminal work, *The Sociological Imagination* (2000).

D. FINDINGS

a.) Demographic Data

The demographic characteristics of the study participants are presented in Table 1.

Table-1: Participant Profile

Number	City/District of Origin	Gender	Age Group	Marital status	Number of children	Educational Status
K1	Adiyaman	Female	26	Married	3	High School
K2	Elbistan (K. Maraş)	Female	34	Single	None	High School
K3	Hatay	Female	23	Single	None	University
K4	Hatay	Female	49	Married	4	University

K5	Adıyaman	Male	35	Married	3	High School
K6	Adıyaman	Male	46	Married	3	University
K7	Hatay	Female	19	Single	None	High School
K8	İskenderun	Female	60	Married	2	High School
K9	Hatay	Female	25	Single	None	Junior College
K10	İskenderun	Male	61	Married	None	Secondary School
K11	Adıyaman	Female	21	Single	None	High School
K12	Adıyaman	Male	50	Married	4	High School
K13	Gaziantep	Male	26	Married	1	High School
K14	Diyarbakır	Male	42	Married	3	Primary School
K15	İskenderun	Male	66	Married	2	University
K16	Malatya	Male	45	Married	3	University

The gender distribution of the participants was equal: eight were female and eight were male. The mean age of participants was 39.25 years. The youngest participant was 19 years old and the oldest was 66 years old. Regarding their places of origin and earthquake experience locations, the participants originated from provinces including Adıyaman, Hatay, İskenderun, Kahramanmaraş, Diyarbakır, Malatya, and Gaziantep.

Furthermore, 11 of the participants were married, and five were single. Among those who were married, ten had children. The minimum number of offspring was 1, and the maximum number of offspring was 4.

With respect to educational attainment, five of the participants held university degrees, one possessed a junior college diploma, eight had completed high school, one had attained a secondary school certificate, and one had completed primary education.

b.) Life Situations of the Participants Before, During and After the Earthquake

This subsection presents findings regarding participants' prior earthquake experiences, their locations and companions during the Maraş earthquake, the condition of their residences in their hometowns, the rationale for selecting Bolu, and related information.

Table-2: Previous earthquake experience

Earthquake Experience Before	Number	Where?	When?

Yes	13	Hatay	Doesn't remember
		Adiyaman	1997
		İstanbul	1999
		Sakarya	1999
		Ceyhan	Doesn't remember
		Elâziğ	Doesn't remember
		İskenderun	Doesn't remember
No	3		
TOTAL	16		

Thirteen participants reported having previously experienced earthquakes in their lives, albeit typically accompanied by minor seismic activity. According to their accounts, the Maraş earthquake exhibited significantly greater intensity compared to any prior seismic events they had encountered. For instance, P11-KA stated, "Adiyaman used to shake once a year," while P16-EM elaborated, "We have experienced an earthquake in Elâziğ before, but not like this one. We felt it very lightly." One of the other participants had experienced the 1999 Sakarya earthquake while employed as a seasonal agricultural worker harvesting hazelnuts, which he referred to as "the major seismic event." However, he explained that he had experienced this earthquake while residing in a nylon tent, thus minimizing its impact on him.

When the study participants were asked to describe their experiences of the Maraş earthquake, 15 reported that they were most significantly affected by the initial major seismic event at dawn on February 6, as they were at home with their families sleeping during that time. Regarding the subsequent large-magnitude earthquake that occurred in the afternoon, the participants indicated that they were all outside of their residences. Consequently, they were less affected by the subsequent event. Only one participant reported being equally affected by both major seismic events, while another participant stated that he was minimally impacted by either event due to his solitary presence in a small structure where he was employed as a nocturnal security guard at the time.

The post-earthquake damage status of the residences occupied by the participants until the day of assessment is as follows:

1. Five of the participants' dwellings remained habitable following the seismic event.
2. Four of the participants' residences sustained moderate damage.
3. Four of the participants' dwellings are classified as uninhabitable due to severe structural compromise; and
4. Three of the participants' residences were completely destroyed.

Individuals in the latter two categories reported that their residences sustained minor damage from the initial seismic event but experienced severe damage or complete destruction as a result of the subsequent earthquake.

Due to the participants' brief stay in the region following the earthquake, only five individuals proceeded to Bolu immediately. Conversely, two of the remaining participants initially retreated to their earthquake-resistant residences in their villages, despite being located within the same seismic zone. The others relocated to cities relatively distant from the earthquake-affected area, such as Ankara (1 individual), Mersin (1 individual), Düzce (1 individual), Fethiye (2 individuals), Adana (1 individual), or Elazığ (1 individual), to reside with their relatives or acquaintances. Upon recognizing the challenges of long-term cohabitation in a large household and being presented with options by AFAD, the individuals ultimately opted to relocate to Bolu to reside in state dormitories typically allocated to university students. In this context, some individuals voluntarily chose Bolu due to existing social connections, while others were compelled to select Bolu dormitories owing to the absence of alternative accommodation options in more populous urban centers such as Ankara. The subsequent statements by the participants elucidated this situation:

"Initially, we traveled to Yayladağ [in Hatay], to my grandfather's residence. We remained there for two weeks. Subsequently, we proceeded directly to Bolu. We resided with my brother for two weeks, and thereafter, we inhabited a dormitory for two months". P3-KH

"...They [(state officials)] inquired whether any individuals desired to relocate to Muğla or Konya, stating that transportation would be provided in the evening. We proceeded from there to Konya, and subsequently to Ankara. [In Ankara], we were informed that our options were limited to Düzce or Bolu. We initially traveled to Düzce, where we resided for 15 days; however, the conditions were unsatisfactory. I informed my spouse of my intention to travel to Ankara..., but Ankara had reached capacity. ...Consequently, we relocated to Bolu. The dormitory and its amenities were satisfactory. Currently, we reside in the residence of an acquaintance in Bolu. This accommodation had previously been allocated to an individual from Maraş. The dormitory accommodation was suitable for me. Its proximity to the hospital allowed for daily visits, and we became accustomed to our fellow residents in the dormitory". P8-KIH

"Our preference was to relocate to Ankara, but Mamak [(referring to the dormitory)] had reached capacity. We were presented with the options of Bolu and Düzce, and we subsequently established residence in the dormitory [in Bolu]!" K1-KA

"We initially arrived in Ankara. Upon being informed that the nearest suitable location was in Bolu, we proceeded there... and resided in the dormitory for a duration of three months." P2-KEM

"My sibling was already in Bolu. We had been traveling between locations [prior to that]." P3-KH.

With the exception of one participant who had resided in Bolu for five months, all other participants had been residing in Bolu for seven months. However, subsequent to the authorities' request for them to vacate the dormitories due to the commencement of the new academic year, 12 individuals procured rental accommodations, 1 individual relocated to a friend's residence, and 2 individuals were accommodated in housing provided by a benefactor.

As of the present time, although a subset of the population (eight individuals) expressed a desire to return to their places of origin, another subset (six individuals) indicated their unwillingness to do so. The

remaining participants (two individuals) expressed uncertainty regarding whether to remain in Bolu or return to their previous locations. Those who expressed a preference for returning to their places of origin cited cultural disparities and the lack of social connections, including friends, relatives, and family members, in Bolu, as primary motivating factors. However, they also indicated that their return would be contingent upon the restoration of their residences or the construction of new housing. The subsequent quotations from study participants illuminated their viewpoints:

"We will return when our house is rebuilt. All relatives were present. This is the location of my birth and upbringing!" P1-KA.

"It is our place of origin. However, we lack accommodation there. Consequently, the date remains uncertain. We will return upon completion of the house." P7-KH

Conversely, the participants who expressed a desire not to return cited several factors: they had established stability in Bolu, experienced reduced social pressure, perceived it as a secure environment, had opportunities for permanent employment, or appreciated Bolu's tranquility, natural aesthetics, climate, and related attributes. The following section presents selected participants' articulations of their perspectives on this matter.

"Regrettably, I experienced the loss of my fiancé in a vehicular accident [in the hometown]. Living conditions were more challenging there. At present, I am employed here. Previously, I was dependent on my bedridden mother's income and unable to secure insured employment. My occupation was in a high-school cafeteria." P2-KEM

"My associates engage in commercial work for the municipality [in Bolu]. They operate as subcontractors and are self-employed. My role involves laying paving stones. We have established residence here and have developed a routine. I receive daily compensation. We endeavor to sustain our livelihood in this location." P13-EG

"This environment is more conducive to the educational development of children. The interpersonal dynamics and cultural milieu are significantly more favorable here. [In terms of conditions,] I perceive that the standard of living here is 25-30 years ahead of my place of origin. Nevertheless, this is the current reality." P14-ED

"It [(referring to hometown)] is exceedingly unfavorable. When compared to Bolu, I have no desire to return. I do not anticipate improvement. This was the primary motivating factor." P15-EIH

Conversely, when inquired about human casualties resulting from the earthquake, only two participants reported no fatalities within their close social circle. However, three individuals experienced the loss of a first-degree relative, while the remaining participants (11 individuals) had second-degree relatives who perished. One participant described this tragic situation as follows: "There were too many relatives. But half of the town died. I can't bear to count." P2-KEM

c.) The Participants' Description of the Earthquake In Terms of Their Experiences

This section presents findings regarding participants' recollections of the earthquake, including their definitions and comparisons of the event, descriptions of the immediate and subsequent impacts, initial thoughts during the occurrence, and explanations and justifications for the earthquake's causes.

1.) What the Earthquake Reminds the Participants

Table-3: What the earthquake reminds

Theme	Code
The first thing that comes to his/her mind when he/she thinks of the earthquake now	Cold Rain Despair Bitter Fear Something horrible Concussion Sound Noise Columns Apocalypse Mass funeral Living in the moment Disorganization Death Life Absence

When individuals contemplate earthquakes, their primary associations often include feelings of helplessness, fear, and perceptions of noise and mortality. These sensations are frequently accompanied by environmental factors such as cold temperatures and precipitation, as well as physical discomfort. Numerous study participants described an overwhelming sense of trepidation, with one individual specifically noting that he had never experienced an event of such magnitude in his 35 years of existence, and that this apprehension persisted, manifesting in heightened vigilance for subtle indicators such as the oscillation of light fixtures. According to another participant, inclement weather conditions, particularly cold temperatures, exacerbated

feelings of powerlessness and provided a stark contextual backdrop to her experiences. Two additional participants articulated their emotional responses and impressions as follows.

"The imagery of mass casualties comes to mind. I contemplate the importance of acting without hesitation, avoiding accumulation, maintaining cleanliness, and practicing love and forgiveness henceforth. At this juncture, it is imperative to recognize the absence of anything beyond. The well-known admonition to 'be prepared [for the earthquake]' emerges in my thoughts. Concepts of humanity, sharing, and disorganization arise." P6-EA

"A sense of despair and powerlessness in the face of natural forces emerges. This vulnerability can be induced by seismic events, inundations, or conflagrations. Such moments exemplify the pinnacle of human helplessness." P14-ED

2.) How the Participants Define the Earthquake

Table 4: How the earthquake is defined

Theme	Code
<p>Defining the earthquake as</p>	<p>Natural phenomenon</p> <p>Natural disaster</p> <p>Cavity in the Earth's crust</p> <p>End (end of the world, end of life)</p> <p>Despair</p> <p>Apocalypse</p> <p>The rehearsal of the Day of Judgement</p> <p>Small apocalypse</p> <p>Fear</p> <p>Detachment</p> <p>Nature's Assassination</p> <p>Negligence</p> <p>The fine line between life and death</p>

The overwhelming majority of respondents, irrespective of their religious or secular background, characterize the earthquake as an "apocalypse" or "day of judgment" based on their subjective experience. This conceptualization is consistent across gender and age demographics, suggesting a shared cultural perspective on natural disasters that transcends religious or non-religious affiliations. Examples include the following:

"The dual existence of humanity... Manifestation of the afterlife. Bifurcation of one life into two. The rehearsal of the Day of Judgment that is in the Qur'an". K1-KA

"On that day [of judgment], the infant will be separated from the mother, and the mother will be separated from the infant. We experienced this [during and after the earthquake]. We witnessed that. We observed numerous distressing occurrences that I cannot fully articulate. We encountered numerous phenomena that one should recount. Upon entering, I found myself unable to exit. The term catastrophe is inadequate. It was akin to a microcosm of the apocalypse!" K6-EA

"From a scientific perspective, the Earth was releasing its energy. I was conscious. For me, it resembled an apocalyptic event. This was my initial experience of such a seismic event. We descended one floor, then two floors, and I doubted my survival. No individual assists another. This is how one involuntarily becomes self-centered." P11-KA

3.) What the Participants Liken the Earthquake to

Table 5: What the earthquake is likened to

Theme	Code
Metaphor	War Little apocalypse Horror movie Armageddon End of the world Small trailer of the apocalypse The earth boils like a bubbling pot Something unique Iceberg Someone trying to drop fruit from a tree

The study participants experienced difficulty in conceptualizing their experience of the earthquake, finding it challenging to draw comparisons between such an unprecedented event and their quotidian experiences. They frequently characterized it as "something unprecedented" and drew analogies to a "horror movie" or a "movie" experienced and observed in a virtual realm beyond reality. This suggests that the intensity of the horror experienced during the event was so profound that it appeared unrealistic. Imagery of dark, cold, and deserted urban environments, reminiscent of a horror film, was prevalent, emphasizing the unsettling and

desolate atmosphere following the earthquake. This comparison underscores the participants' sense of detachment, as if they were mere observers of unfolding chaos.

Some participants drew parallels between the media coverage of the war in Ukraine and the earthquake, likening the latter to a war zone with subterranean explosions. This analogy emphasizes the extent of destruction and chaos they observed, comparable to scenes from a conflict area.

Furthermore, as noted in the preceding section, participants employed analogies such as apocalypse and judgment day, concepts typically associated with the afterlife narratives of religions. The cataclysmic nature of the event was apparent, with alterations in the sky's hue and anomalous sounds emanating from the ground contributing to the surreal experience. This reflected the profound uncertainty they experienced regarding subsequent events, akin to the unpredictability characteristic of the conclusion of a horror film.

According to one respondent, the earthquake was also likened to an interminable voyage on a vessel navigating through an iceberg without sonar, symbolizing the apprehension of an imminent catastrophe. Additionally, another participant's metaphor of a "fruit tree," wherein individuals are represented as fruit susceptible to falling when the earth trembles, further encapsulates the perception of instability and the threat of being displaced from a position of security.

4.) How the Participants Describe the Moment and Aftermath of the Earthquake

Table 6: How the Moment and Aftermath of the Earthquake is Described

Theme	Moment of the Earthquake	After the Earthquake
	Code	Code
Describing the earthquake as...	Sound (Crackling, humming coming from the building) Hugging Holding hands Violent shaking Gathering in the corridor Moving things around Breaking through the wall Taking refuge in Allah (Reciting Salawat) Awakenning from sleep Don't get up and fall	Darkness Rain The Unopening Door Screams Shouting Crying Sounds (People under the building shouting, "Save us") Weird house Cold Hunger Road closures

	Separation	Battlefield
	Death	Debris
	Crushing under the rubble	Day of Judgment
		Pungent odor
		Loss of appetite
		Hunger
		Between dream and reality
		Despair
		Getting in the car
		Traffic paralysis

When describing the moment of the earthquake, participants consistently initiated their accounts with phrases such as "we were sleeping," "we were asleep," or "we woke up," emphasizing the abrupt and disorienting nature of the event. The most salient auditory stimuli during the earthquake were characterized as "howling" and the structural fracturing of buildings, which intensified the traumatic nature of the experience.

Participants also reported violent seismic activity and the displacement of objects, frequently resorting to religious invocation by reciting Salavat, a supplication to Allah. This religious practice underscores the sense of desperation and hope for divine intervention during such catastrophic events.

The aftermath of the earthquake was similarly manifested through auditory phenomena. Vocalizations, including shouting and screaming, as well as the clamor of crowds imploring for rescue, were prevalent. Physical sensations of cold, rain, shivering, fear, and helplessness were frequently reported, providing a vivid depiction of the chaos and despair that ensued. Several representative testimonies are presented below.

"I was asleep. What time was it, 3:58? Who could have been awake at that time? Naturally, we exited the house after the shaking ceased. In the '99 earthquake in Sakarya, it was akin to riding a horse as it leapt. In contrast, the Earth moved laterally from north to south. It resembled the Mehter march, with two steps forward and one backward." P14-ED

"The structure appears to be on the verge of collapse. I contemplated my mortality, survival prospects, and the possibility of being entombed beneath the debris. My thoughts turned to my grandchildren, for whom I felt the most profound concern. I anticipated being separated from them." P15-EIH

"The walk-in closet would be [on the floor]. There was a clock on the wall, reminiscent of a starfish. I observed it [during the earthquake] and fell onto a pillow. The temperature is low. I expressed the intention to sleep enveloped by sunlight [to maintain warmth]." P8-KIH

5.) Who and What First Came to Mind for the Participants During the Earthquake

Table 7: Who and What First Came to Mind During the Earthquake

Theme	Who	What
	Code	Code
...First Came to Mind	My children Brothers and sisters My family My grandchildren	Death I froze at that moment, I was in shock at that moment Greed of people and contractors Those I hurt and those I upset Will I survive? I'll die in a tragic death. Where do we go, what do we do?

When the participants were asked, "Who and what comes to mind first during the earthquake?" irrespective of gender or age, those with children predominantly reported that their offspring were their primary concern. This was followed by thoughts of spouses, parents, siblings, grandchildren, relatives, and friends. The immediate concern for loved ones underscores the significance of familial bonds and the innate protective instinct towards one's closest relations.

However, some participants experienced difficulty articulating their thoughts during the seismic event. Many described a state of cognitive paralysis at the moment, unable to process information due to the overwhelming shock and terror. For others, contemplations of mortality, interpersonal conflicts, societal avarice, and the potential dramatic nature of their demise emerged. Additionally, they considered their probability of survival and the uncertainty surrounding their potential location and means of survival.

6.) How the Participants Justify the Earthquake

Upon analysis of participants' responses regarding their perceptions of potential causes for the earthquake they experienced, three distinct approaches emerged among the respondents: scientific, religious/metaphysical, and conspiracy theories. However, it is noteworthy that for some individuals, these perspectives were not mutually exclusive; rather, they were frequently intertwined, reflecting the complexity and ambiguity of their cognitive processes concerning this phenomenon.

From a scientifically dominant perspective, certain participants acknowledged the geological changes and role of fault lines in causing earthquakes. They perceived the earthquake as a natural and scientific phenomenon without a specific metaphysical cause, integral to the life cycle on Earth. However, when considering the extensive destruction of buildings following the earthquake and the loss of human lives, they emphasized anthropogenic factors, such as inadequately constructed buildings and the failure and inefficacy of state authorities to regulate and authorize them, rather than the earthquake itself. Several examples of this approach are as follows:

"The Earth changes its shape. It also has a geological period. However, the destruction is because of man. P1-KA

"Earthquakes occur without a specific cause. The absence of earthquakes would disrupt the natural lifecycle. It is noteworthy that a common adage states: earthquakes do not cause fatalities, but rather the collapse of structures does. This phenomenon was observed in the recent event. K7-KH

"This seismic event occurred due to the presence of a fault line in the Earth's crust. The earthquake was not associated with religious or divine factors. The cause of this phenomenon is rooted in scientific principles. K12-EA

Conversely, some individuals interpreted the earthquake as a divine calamity, punishment, or admonition from God to humanity for moral transgressions. This sentiment was echoed by those who posited that the earthquake served as a warning to ameliorate social and moral behavior. This perspective underscores the moral and spiritual reflections that a disaster has elicited. To illustrate explanations based on this perspective, the following examples can be cited.

"This can be interpreted as a divine calamity; what other explanation is possible? It is a form of catastrophe!" P4-KH

"I believe this is a manifestation of divine retribution. The events that transpire in life and in the world, as well as our actions—for instance, the widespread lack of mutual respect—suggest that this occurrence may serve as a form of admonition for us to rectify our behavior." P9-KH

Furthermore, as mentioned above, some participants preferred to explain the earthquake by emphasizing both its natural (i.e., geological) and religious aspects; in other words, by expressing that it has a complex structure. The following example illustrates this perspective:

"Earthquakes are natural events, natural... However, it is also something that occurs under the command of Allah Almighty. I was immobilized for the first time during the earthquake. This was analogous to the end of the world. The noise was such that it seemed as if life would cease, as if everything had concluded!" K2-KEM

Conspiracy theories emerged as another category of explanations for the earthquake, with some participants speculating on the involvement of foreign powers or man-made causes. However, those who expressed concern about this issue generally did not see it as the sole cause of the earthquake, but rather as one of the factors, or rather as a trigger, intertwined with other causes. To provide a few examples of this point of view:

"One may also consider the possibility of foreign powers' involvement. However, it would not have occurred without divine providence". K2-KEM

"The earthquake resulted from the accumulation of energy along fault lines over an extended period. Some individuals propose the hypothesis of a man-made earthquake. I found myself in a position of considering two perspectives." P13-EG

"I acknowledge the scientific evidence that our country is situated on a fault line. I accept scientific explanations. However, this is not the sole interpretation. ...Presently, we are experiencing additional seismic events. The explanation is not limited to scientific, religious,

or popular discourse. [(The speaker indicates that they do not believe the earthquake can be fully explained by scientific, religious, or popular discursive interpretations alone).] K6-EA

d.) The Impact and Consequences of the Earthquake on the Participant's Lives, Relations and Attitudes

Subsequent to the participants' reflections on their earthquake experiences, inquiries were posed regarding the effects and consequences of the seismic event on their lives and attitudes toward life and the future, their perceptions of being referred to as "earthquake survivors," and their preferred alternative descriptors. This section examines the responses to these inquiries.

1.) The Impact and Consequences of the Earthquake on The Participant's Lives

The impact of the earthquake on the participants' lives was articulated through the concept of "disruption of order." This conceptualization likely stemmed from their experience of a markedly different life in an unfamiliar urban environment. Even in cases where participants did not suffer familial losses in the earthquake, they experienced significant material deprivation, particularly the loss of their homes and accumulated possessions. Additionally, many participants faced unemployment and displacement from their native land and social milieu. Consequently, it was observed that participants commonly experienced feelings of grief and sadness due to these losses, as well as anxiety and hopelessness stemming from uncertainty about their future circumstances.

One participant reflected on the transformation of her future outlook, noting that she previously held a more optimistic and idealistic perspective, with hope for the future. However, following the loss of her closest friend due to the earthquake, she now experiences a sense of displacement, akin to that of an expatriate, with limited social engagement or activities. Another participant described the significant transition from residing in their own domicile with a garden and livestock to confronting the elevated cost of living in Bolu without income, having previously produced the majority of their sustenance. The tangible and psychological impacts were substantial, as another participant described the loss of her residence, possessions, and relatives, and the disruption of her established routine. Her spouse, who previously engaged in automobile trading and operated a kiosk, witnessed the looting of their commercial establishment following the earthquake, exacerbating their losses.

In the study, participants were also queried regarding potential positive impacts of the earthquake on their lives, notwithstanding the associated losses and disasters. Responses to this inquiry were categorized into three distinct groups. The first and most populous group comprised individuals whose socioeconomic conditions deteriorated significantly following the seismic event. A notable example within this group was a participant who reported feeling subjectively ten years older due to the profound grief experienced as a consequence of earthquake-related losses.

Although fewer in number than the first group, a small subset of individuals reported improved socioeconomic opportunities following their relocation to Bolu. One participant stated, "I obtained employment [here]. My sister has received medical treatment. My mother resides in a residence with natural gas heating during winter. I have encountered amiable individuals. Educated individuals did not associate with the economically disadvantaged [in my hometown]. They value [positive] character traits [here]." K2-KEM

Lastly, there are also individuals whose socio-economic circumstances have not undergone significant changes since the earthquake.

2.) The Impact and Consequences of the Earthquake on the Participants' Social Relationships and Attitudes toward Others

The experience of earthquakes, particularly catastrophic events such as the Maraş earthquake, has been observed to induce significant alterations in relations with others, as well as psychological and other effects, as evidenced by numerous studies in this field. This section examines whether participants reported substantial changes in their social relationships following the earthquake experience and, if so, the nature of these changes. Analysis of participants' responses to inquiries on this topic revealed three distinct patterns concerning social relationships: absence of change, pre-existing social isolation, and enhanced interpersonal connections.

First, for some participants, their social relationships remained unchanged, neither increasing nor decreasing. For instance, one participant reported that the earthquake did not affect her relationships as she maintained her social disposition and engaged in activities such as public education classes.

However, the second group reported a tendency to avoid relationships with individuals due to fear of loss, which could be interpreted as a form of social isolation. One participant expressed an inability to establish intimacy or form new relationships and developed a phobia of intimate connections after losing a close friend in the earthquake. The relocation to Bolu had adverse effects on the social and familial relationships of certain individuals. One participant reported a reduction in communication with individuals from their place of origin, as many had experienced loss of family members and were hesitant to initiate contact. Others expressed difficulty in conveying their emotions to Bolu residents, who frequently redirected conversations to their own experiences of the 1999 earthquake. Another participant observed that acquaintances had become socially withdrawn and distanced themselves from relatives. Some individuals also expressed a pessimistic perspective on human nature in general, stemming from negative experiences following the earthquake, as follows:

"The population exhibits highly opportunistic behavior. Initially, I intended to establish residence in Antalya. However, rental prices were 100% inflated. There was significant migration, resulting in overcrowding. My interpersonal relationships have deteriorated. Individuals prioritize self-preservation without consideration for others. In the aftermath of the earthquake, a notable increase in self-interest has emerged among the populace." K13-EG

"In certain locations, ...the true nature of individuals, whether friend or manipulator, has unfortunately been revealed. We have become emotionally distant from numerous individuals. Despite witnessing substantial fatalities and injuries, many people resume their customary behaviors and activities after merely three days, as if no significant event had occurred." P14-ED

Conversely, in the third pattern, a distinct group of individuals reported an improvement in their relationships with relatives following their encounter with mortality. One participant disclosed that, subsequent to the earthquake, they initiated more frequent communication, and welfare checks with their relatives due to an enhanced sense of connection. Some individuals who did not receive support from family and close associates after the earthquake reported developing intimate relationships with others who assisted them through the process. For instance, one participant stated: "It broke my trust [in relatives], but it also ...improved my social relationships [with others]. I realized that good people are not only relatives." P2-KEM Another participant who expressed a similar perspective stated that following the earthquake, he was unable to obtain support from his relatives and received assistance from individuals previously unknown to him: "I experienced a loss of closeness [with my relatives]. I contemplated, [in the event of a tragedy,] whom does one approach first? [I recognize] [n]o environment is as comfortable as one's home; they cannot seek shelter? We resided

with our family for one or two days. We had never stayed for such an extended period before. When I communicated with my friends via telephone, I observed that everyone was dispersed to various locations. The majority of individuals were residing in places separate from their families due to incompatibility in living arrangements." P16-EM

3.) The Impact of the Earthquake on the Participants' Attitude Toward Life and the Future

Table-8: The Effect of the Earthquake on the Attitude Toward Life

Theme	Code
The Effect on the Attitude Toward Life and the Future	Adoption of a more mature approach to life Becoming Religious Remembering your mortality Increased desire to live in the moment Falling into despair Thinking that everything is meaningless

The earthquake appears to have induced significant alterations in participants' perspectives and behaviors, exerting a profound influence on their attitudes toward life. One participant noted that the experience had fostered maturity, reducing their propensity for rebellion in response to minor events and increasing their inclination to persevere through challenges and prioritize living in the present moment. Another participant reported an increase in religious faith and devotion, engaging in more frequent prayer and perceiving their survival as an opportunity for personal improvement, consequently becoming more conscientious about their behavior. Some participants indicated that they had made the decision to adopt head coverings or initiated regular prayer practices following the earthquake. The inevitability of death emerged as a prevalent theme, with one participant elucidating that they had previously experienced fear of death but had subsequently become accustomed to it, even developing familiarity with cemeteries. Additionally, another participant articulated that their capacity for long-term aspirations had diminished, and they could now only plan for a maximum of one year, in stark contrast to their previously expansive imagination.

Conversely, when inquired about potential alterations in their thoughts and expectations regarding the future in light of the earthquake experience, diverse perspectives emerged. One respondent emphasized the necessity of progressing, asserting that while remembrance is crucial, life must continue, and children must resume their education. They expressed that dwellings in the past did not exhibit significant differences. Another respondent indicated a preference for disregarding the earthquake, as discussing it evokes distressing memories that have been deeply ingrained. Similarly, an additional respondent disclosed that they generally refrain from contemplating the event due to its impact on their sleep patterns, although they are gradually attempting to accept the experience.

e.) The Participants' Views on Being Identified as Earthquake Victims

Participants' attitudes toward being referred to as "earthquake victims" (Tr. *depremzede*) can be categorized into two groups: those who express discomfort with the term and those who remain unaffected by

it. The participants who expressed discomfort with being designated as "earthquake victims" perceived that this label conferred upon them a status of defeat, pity, asylum-seeking, and refugeeism. One participant noted that the term evoked memories of their distress and the day they experienced the earthquake, eliciting feelings of sadness and perceived failure. Another participant articulated that the term was distressing, recalling the pitying gazes they encountered at Antalya Airport, and expressed a preference not to be referred to as an earthquake victim. Some participants reported feelings of social exclusion, marginalization, and perceived second-class citizenship, likening their experience to that of Syrian refugees. Another participant expressed that the label "earthquake victim" carried connotations of culpability, as if implying a degree of choice in their circumstances. One participant also conveyed discomfort with the term, associating it with negative stereotypes of individuals from impoverished areas. Consequently, they generally preferred acknowledgment of their losses without explicit reference to earthquakes. A final participant provided the following notable statements regarding the shift in their social status from a position of affluence to one of perceived neediness following the earthquake:

"If there is anyone to pity, pity other people than us. Some individuals donate coats, while others contribute shoes. [But before the earthquake,] [t]his particular individual possessed an abundance of clothing. However, I became unclothed. One can observe the state of human innocence and blamelessness at that moment!" P6-EA

The participants who expressed discomfort with the designation "earthquake victims" (Tr. *Depremzede*) indicated a preference for alternative terms such as "natural disaster survivor," (Tr. *Doğal afetzede*), "guests," (Tr. *Misafirler*), "human defeated," (Tr. *İnsanzede*), "normal people," (Tr. *Normal halk*), "people from Adiyaman," (Tr. *Adiyaman'dan gelmiş insanlar*), "our refugee brothers," (Tr. *Muhacir kardeşlerimiz*), "our survivor brothers," (Tr. *Mağdur kardeşlerimiz*), "survivor," (Tr. *Mağdur*), and "victims of housing produced by dishonest individuals," (Tr. *Sahtekâr insanların ürettiği konut mağdurları*).

Conversely, other participants reported being unaffected by the terminology. One participant stated that the designation was of little consequence to them, as they acknowledged their status as an earthquake survivor. Another participant indicated that the term did not impact them due to their ready acceptance of the label "earthquake victim."

E. Conclusion and Discussion

This study examined the earthquake experiences of individuals who survived the Maraş earthquake on February 6, 2023, utilizing a phenomenological approach. The findings of the study indicated that earthquake survivors generally perceived the earthquake as a "punishment" and a "warning," and conceptualized and interpreted it through a combination of scientific, religious, and conspiracy theories. They also experienced fear and helplessness during the earthquake, as well as feelings of guilt, displacement, victimization, and sympathy. The participants, who predominantly recalled the earthquake in terms of sound, darkness, cold, and death, interpreted the experience as analogous to war, a microcosm of the apocalypse, a state of helplessness, a horror film, and punishment. The essence of these experiences was identified as the sensation of "helplessness."

The earthquake also had a significant impact on participants' perspectives on life. The participants reported that following the earthquake, they experienced increased maturity and religiosity, recognized the ephemeral nature of existence, developed an awareness of mortality, experienced despair, perceived a sense of emptiness, and adopted a focus on present-moment living. Additionally, the earthquake was observed to influence interpersonal relationships, with some participants exhibiting avoidance behaviors in social interactions, while others fostered closer connections with others.

The findings of this study corroborate the growing body of evidence from diverse investigations in this field (e.g. Rehorick, 1986; Green, 2018; Tauba et al., 2020; Zakaria et al., 2021; Djuhardi et al., 2023; Balcı, 2016; Yumbul et al., 2018; Yıldırım et al., 2023; Aslan et al., 2023; Gündüz, 2024; Ulum, 2023; Başkale et al., 2024; Erduran-Tekin, 2024; Yarımkaaya et al., 2024; Ural et al., 2024; Bayhan et al., 2023; Okan et al., 2023; Candemir et al., 2024; Güler et al., 2024; Karacaoğlu et al., 2024), suggesting that individuals' earthquake experiences are complex and multifaceted. Actually, individuals who have survived earthquakes perceive the event not solely as a physical phenomenon but also as an occurrence that impacts their cognitive framework, social interactions, and future outlook. Therefore, post-earthquake intervention and support initiatives should address the psychological, social, and economic requirements of earthquake survivors, as well as their conceptual understanding of the event.

The limitations of this study encompass the restricted sample size and the confined geographical scope, which was limited to earthquake survivors in Bolu Province. Subsequent research should incorporate larger cohorts of participants and earthquake survivors from diverse regions. Furthermore, longitudinal investigations examining the protracted effects of earthquakes could yield significant contributions to the field.

In conclusion, this study employed a phenomenological approach to investigate the earthquake experiences of individuals who were affected by the Maraş earthquake on February 6, 2023, and sought to elucidate the earthquake's position within the realm of personal and social meaning. The findings of this research demonstrated that earthquake survivors perceived the event as a multifaceted experience, with implications extending beyond physical destruction. These results provide valuable insights for the more effective planning of post-earthquake intervention and support initiatives, as well as a more nuanced response to the needs of earthquake survivors.

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