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**The Effects of Religious Rituals and Religious Coping
Methods on the Grief Process and Posttraumatic Growth: A
Qualitative Study**

*Dini Ritüeller ve Dini Başa Çıkma Yöntemlerinin, Yas Süreci
ve Travma Sonrası Büyüme Üzerindeki Etkileri: Nitel Bir
Araştırma*

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the attitudes of people who lost their relatives due to the earthquake towards the mourning process and the role of religious rituals in combating the stressful situation caused by this loss. In the study in which the qualitative research method was adopted, a case study design was also adopted. In the study where the criterion sampling technique was used, a total of 12 participants who experienced loss due to the earthquake were included in the study. The participants stated that this loss was much more severe than a normal loss due to factors such as not being able to meet for the last time, not being able to reach the lost relative and the lack of religious rituals. Accordingly, it was observed that individuals who used positive religious coping styles experienced an increase in spirituality meaning of life and showed signs of post-traumatic growth, such as positive social relationships. On the other hand, most of the individuals who adopted negative religious coping styles experienced more feelings of helplessness and meaninglessness, had more difficulty in accepting the death, withdrew from social relationships, and showed more intense symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Keywords: Psychology of Religion, Earthquake, Grief Process, PTSD, Posttraumatic Growth, Religious Coping

Öz

Bu araştırma, deprem nedeniyle yakınlarını kaybeden bireylerin yas sürecindeki tutumlarını ve stresle başa çıkma yöntemlerini, özellikle dinî ritüellerin rolünü ele almaktadır. Buradan hareketle çalışmanın amacı, bu kaybın etkilerini anlamak, bu süreçte dinî inançların/ritüellerin ve başa çıkma mekanizmalarının nasıl bir rol oynadığını belirlemektir. Bunun yanı sıra araştırma, bu bireylerin başa çıkma stratejilerinden, dinî inançların yas sürecindeki etkilerine, dinî ve kültürel ritüellerin (cenaze ve defin işlemleri, taziye, mevlit okuma vb.) yas sürecine olan katkılarından, deprem sonucu yaşanan kayıplar ile diğer sebeplerle yaşanan kayıplar arasındaki farka ve deprem sonucu yakınlarını kaybeden bireylerde meydana gelen psiko-sosyal değişimlere de odaklanmaktadır. Bu amaçla derinlemesine bilgi sağlaması bakımından nitel araştırma yönteminin benimsendiği çalışmada, ayrıca, durum çalışması deseni benimsenerek, bir olguyu etkileyen çeşitli unsurların incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Araştırmanın evrenini 6 Şubat Kahramanmaraş depremi nedeniyle yakınlarını kaybeden kişiler oluştururken, örneklem 12 kişiden oluşmaktadır. Bu örneklem, depremde yakınlarını kaybetmiş bireyleri temsil etmek amacıyla ölçüt örnekleme tekniği kullanılarak seçilmiştir. Katılımcıların demografik özellikleri dikkate alınarak çeşitlilik sağlanmıştır. Araştırmada veri doygunluğuna ulaşıldığı düşünüldüğünden 12 katılımcı ile araştırma veri toplama işlemi sonlandırılmıştır. Katılımcılar 19-55 yaş aralığında olup yaş ortalaması 33'tür. Katılımcıların 7'si erkek 5'i kadındır. Ayrıca 8'i bekâr 4'ü evlidir. Katılımcıların büyük bir çoğunluğu birincil depreceden yakın kaybetmiş olup tamamı 2 ve daha fazla kayıp yaşamıştır. Veri toplama aracı olarak modern anket türlerinden e-posta anketi tekniği kullanılmıştır. Bu yöntem, katılımcıların deprem sonrası yaşadıkları deneyimleri daha rahat paylaşmalarına olanak tanınması bakımından tercih edilmiştir. Uzman psikologlar ve din psikolojisi alanında uzmanlar tarafından belirlenen sorularla katılımcılardan derinlemesine cevaplar alınmıştır. Araştırmaya katılan bireyler, yaşadıkları kaybı diğer kayıplarla kıyasladıklarında, son defa görüşememe, kaybedilen yakına ulaşamama ve dinî ritüellerin eksikliği gibi unsurlar nedeniyle bu kaybın normal bir kayıptan çok daha ağır yaşandığını ifade etmişlerdir. Buna göre çalışmamızda da katılımcıların çoğu, korku, ölüm korkusu, şok, akrabaları arama, çaresizlik, donma, dehşet, hissizlik, inanamama, ağlayamama, ağlama, panik, bağırma gibi tepkilerle karşılaştıklarını ifade etmişlerdir. Olayın etkisi altında kalan katılımcıların, "Atom bombası sandık.", "Saldırı oldu sandık.", "Suriye'den bomba geldi sandık.", "Kıyamet sandım.", "Korku filmi sahnesi gibiydi." gibi ifadeleri, duygusal yoğunluğun ve yaşanan travmanın şiddetini vurgulamaktadır. Nitekim araştırmamızda 5 katılımcının TSSB tanısı aldığı, toplam 6 katılımcının depremden 6 ay sonra hala korku, çaresizlik, acizlik, yemeden içmeden zevk alamama, uykusuzluk, rüyada depremi görme, ağlama nöbetleri, yoğun sigara kullanımı, panik atak, tırnak yeme, odaklanamama, insanlardan kopukluk gibi olumsuz durumların devam ettiği tespit edilmiştir. Yaşanan bu durum, travmanın şiddetinin yüksek olması, insanların psikolojik destek kaynaklarına yeterince ulaşamaması ile açıklanabilir. Sosyal destek kaynakları açısından bakıldığında, katılımcılardan yarısının insanlardan, diğer yarısının ise inançtan destek aldığı ve başa çıkma sürecinde en çok dinî inançtan destek alma eğilimi içerisinde oldukları tespit edilmiştir.

Buna göre olumlu dinî başa çıkma tarzlarını kullanan bireylerin aktif bir dinî teslimiyet ve Tanrı ile iş birliği içinde oldukları, ölümü daha kolay kabullendikleri, depremden önce de hayatlarında dine yer verdikleri; depremden sonra ise ibadetlerde artış, yardım davranışlarında bulunma gibi olumlu dinî düşünce ve davranış değişiklikleri yaşadıkları ve insan ilişkilerine dikkat etme gibi daha fazla travma sonrası büyüme belirtileri gösterdikleri gözlenmiştir. Nitekim çalışmamızda da olumlu dinî başa çıkma tarzlarını kullanan 7 katılımcı dinî düşünce ve davranışlarında olumlu yönde değişiklik olduğunu dile getirmiştir. Dolayısıyla olumlu dinî başa çıkmanın yas sürecini olumlu etkilediği, olumsuz dinî başa çıkmanın ise yas sürecini sekteye uğrattığı söylenebilir. Nitekim olumsuz dinî başa çıkma yöntemlerine yönelen katılımcılar arasında, manevi hoşnutsuzluk yaşama, Tanrı'nın gücü ve kudretine duyulan şüphe, ibadetleri bırakma gibi olumsuz dinî başa çıkma tarzlarını benimseyen bireylerin çoğunun depremden önce dinî yaşantılarına pek fazla vurgu yapmadıkları, daha fazla çaresizlik ve anlamsızlık hissi yaşadıkları, ölümü kabullenmekte daha fazla zorlanarak sosyal ilişkilerden geri çekildikleri ve daha yoğun Travma Sonrası Stres Bozukluğu (TSSB) belirtileri gösterdikleri gözlemlenmiştir. Örneğin çalışmamızda da 6 katılımcının genel olarak hayatın anlamına dair bakış açısının olumsuz etkilendiği, bunlardan 4'ünün ise yoğun şekilde anlamsızlık hissettiği ve sosyal ilişkilerden çekildiği tespit edilmiştir. Yarıdan fazla katılımcı profesyonel destek almıştır. Yas sürecinde dinî törenlere katılım önemlidir; katılımcıların çoğu cenazeye katıldığı halde, defin işlemleri aceleyle yapılmış, usulüne uygun yapılmamıştır, törende az insanın olması gibi faktörler cenaze töreninin olumlu etkilerinin önünde engel oluşturmuştur ve katılımcılar ölümü kabullenmekte zorlanmışlardır. Törene katılmayan katılımcılar ise yarım kalmışlık hissetmiş, ölümleri kabullenememiş ve son görevlerini yapamadıkları için suçluluk hissetmişlerdir. Benzer durumlar taziye töreni için de geçerlidir; katılımcıların çoğu cenaze törenine katılsa da taziye töreni yapılmadığı için katılamamışlardır. Törene katılmayan katılımcılar yalnızlık, çaresizlik ve eksiklik hissettiklerini ifade etmişlerdir. Taziye törenine katılan az sayıda katılımcı ise acıyı paylaşarak hafiflettiklerini, yalnız hissetmediklerini ve ölümü daha kolay kabullendiklerini ifade etmişlerdir. Dolayısıyla, usulüne uygun yapılan cenaze ve taziye törenlerinin dinî sorumlulukları yerine getirme, ölümü kabullenme, sosyal destek olarak acıyı paylaşma noktasında önemli işlevinin olduğu ve sağlıklı bir yas sürecine ve travma sonrası büyüme sürecine katkı sağladığı, aksi durumda yas sürecini olumsuz etkilediği söylenebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Psikolojisi, Deprem, Yas Süreci, TSSB, Travma Sonrası Büyüme, Dini Başa Çıkma.

Introduction*

Turkey experienced a highly traumatic earthquake disaster last year in terms of its intensity and consequences. On February 6, 2023, two earthquakes of magnitudes 7.7 and 7.6, with their epicentre in Kahramanmaraş, occurred, causing widespread destruction in 11 provinces. These earthquakes affected 14 million people. When looked at in terms of intensity, affected area, loss of life, and severe damage, these earthquakes are unprecedented disasters in recent history. Indeed, because of the earthquakes, over half a million buildings were damaged, and more than 48,000 people lost their lives.¹ Dozens of people left behind experienced great sadness and trauma. Since the experience of

* Bu makale 20-21 Ekim 2023 tarihleri arasında Düzce'de düzenlenen "Uluslararası Doğal Afetler ve Din Sempozyumu" adlı etkinlikte sözlü bildiri olarak sunulmuş, özeti kongre/konferans/sempozyum bildiri özet kitabında basılmıştır. "Bir Başa Çıkma Mekanizması Olarak Dinî Ritüellerin Depremzede Bireylerin Yas Süreci Üzerindeki Etkisinin İncelenmesi" başlıklı bildirinin tamamlanmış halidir.

1 Cumhurbaşkanlığı Strateji ve Bütçe Başkanlığı (CSBB), 2023 Kahramanmaraş ve Hatay Deprem-leri Raporu (Ankara: Türkiye Cumhurbaşkanlığı Strateji ve Bütçe Başkanlığı, 2023), 7.

loss brings with it the mourning process, this study focuses on the impact of religious coping and religious rituals on trauma and grief.

1. Trauma and Mourning Process

Trauma can be defined as a state of discomfort and stress arising from the memories of an unusual, catastrophic experience that leaves deep traces on the mental structure and personality of the individual.² People experience many traumatic events in their daily lives. The current literature in the field of psychology on the concept of trauma indicates that experiences having a traumatic effect on the individual are often expressed as traumatic events or experiences.³ Indeed, earthquakes and the destruction they cause are classified as traumatic events in terms of being unpredictable, harbouring negative emotions such as anxiety, helplessness, and fear, and causing problems in nutrition and shelter⁴.

As with most traumatic events, earthquakes bring with them a loss and, consequently a mourning process that must be coped with. The mourning process may include negativities such as denial of death and impairment in functionality. Although these experiences are normal in the normal mourning process, the individual must learn to live with the losses to continue his life in a healthy way.⁵ However, unlike other traumatic events, earthquakes, the suddenness of the losses, the disruption of the body integrity of the deceased, the inaccessibility of some funerals and the inability to meet with the loved one for the last time can complicate the mourning process experienced by survivors.⁶ Actually, in the current literature in the field of psychology on the concept of trauma, it is stated that sudden deaths resulting from natural disasters such as earthquakes prevent individuals from experiencing the mourning process in a healthy way. This disruption causes mourning to take on a more “pathological/traumatic” state by diverting it from its natural course.⁷

2 Selçuk Budak, *Psikoloji Terimleri Sözlüğü* (Ankara: Bilim ve Sanat Yayınları, 2000), 769.

3 A. Tamer Aker, *Temel Sağlık Hizmetlerinde Ruhsal Travmaya Yaklaşım* (Ankara: Grafik Tasarım, 2012), 11.

4 Naci Kula, “Deprem ve Dini Başa Çıkma”, *Hitit Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 1/1 (Haziran 2002), 234.

5 Ayten Zara, “Kayıplar, Yas Tepkileri ve Yas Süreci”, *Yaşadıkça: Psikolojik Sorunlar ve Başa Çıkma Yolları*, ed. Ayten Zara (İstanbul: İmge Yayınları, 2011), 73-90.

6 Nurullah Yelboğa, “Kahramanmaraş Depremi Özelinde Travmatik Yas ve Sosyal Hizmetin Yas Danışmanlığı Müdahalesi”, *TOBIDER - International Journal of Social Sciences* 7/1 (Mart 2023), 99.

7 Judith Viorst, *Necessary Losses: The Loves, Illusions, Dependencies, and Impossible Expectations That All of Us Have to Give up in Order to Grow* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 240-255.

2. Religious Coping, Religious Rituals and Mourning Process

Earthquakes not only cause mass casualties but can also cause a range of traumatic experiences, such as loss of a sense of security, irreversible loss of former life and economic losses. These events can leave people facing a process of mourning and coping. In addition, earthquakes can trigger negative emotional states in individuals, such as intense levels of anxiety, fear, helplessness, hopelessness, and insecurity. People may resort to various emotional, behavioural, and cognitive coping mechanisms to overcome these stressful emotional states⁸. Actually, according to studies, religious belief is an important coping mechanism following natural disasters and traumatic loss situations.⁹ In a study conducted by Kula on earthquake survivors, for example, the majority of the participants (76%) tried to get support from their religious beliefs in coping processes. In particular, positive religious coping styles such as trust in God as a superior power, the belief that the events they experience take place within a sense of fate, the idea that traumatic events are experienced as a test and the expectation that these difficulties will be rewarded in the after-life can contribute to a healthier grief process.¹⁰

Another element that helps cope with loss during the mourning process is religious rituals such as funerals and condolences. Attendance at the funeral, washing the deceased, carrying the coffin, throwing soil during burial, visiting the house to offer condolences, and other practices help the bereaved complete their own mourning process and bid farewell to the deceased.¹¹ The inability to perform the expected and desired rituals following the death, such as condolences and funeral ceremonies, leads to an increase in grief responses.¹² Factors such as the inability to hold a funeral ceremony and the inability to perform the funeral prayer collectively lead individuals to be deprived of social support.¹³

8 Kenneth I. Pargament vd., "The Many Methods of Religious Coping: Development and Initial Validation of the RCOPE", *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 56/4 (2000), 520-525.

9 Jocelyn H. Newton vd., "Assessing Giftedness in Children: Comparing the Accuracy of Three Shortened Measures of Intelligence to the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales, Fifth Edition", *Psychology in the Schools* 45/6 (2008), 523-526.

10 Zehra Işık, *Sen Öldün Ben Büyüdüm* (İstanbul: Açılım Kitap, 2015), 268-282; Ralph W. Hood vd., *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach* (New York: Guilford Press, 2009), 198-199.

11 Alexander Burrell - Lucy E. Selman, "How Do Funeral Practices Impact Bereaved Relatives' Mental Health, Grief and Bereavement? A Mixed Methods Review with Implications for Covid-19", *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying* 85/2 (Haziran 2022), 345-348.

12 Esra Savaş, "Covid-19 Sürecinde Yas", *Türkiye Sosyal Hizmet Araştırmaları Dergisi* 4/3 (Aralık 2020), 86.

13 Feyza Çelik - Nermin Gündüz, "Covid-19 Pandemisinde Yas", *Klinik Psikiyatri Dergisi* 23/50 (2020), 100.

3. Religious Coping and Posttraumatic Growth

Traumatic events like earthquakes have the potential to impact every facet of an individual's life, resulting in various outcomes such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or posttraumatic growth.¹⁴ Although psychological problems (like TSSB) are mostly observed after traumatic events such as earthquakes, some people experience positive changes after the trauma by gaining some strength and new coping skills. This is called "posttraumatic growth".¹⁵

Individuals with PTSD commonly exhibit symptoms such as nightmares, hypervigilance, difficulties in concentration, irritability, and outbursts of anger, whereas those experiencing posttraumatic growth tend to display heightened sensitivity in interpersonal relationships, increased religious and spiritual feelings, a profound comprehension of the meaning of life, and feelings of gratitude.¹⁶ According to Joseph and Linley's Organismic Appraisal theory and Calhoun and Tedeschi's Functional Descriptive theory, it can be argued that religious beliefs play a crucial role in the development of PTSD and posttraumatic growth. In fact, both theories suggest that religious beliefs are significant in helping individuals make sense of and assess their traumatic experiences.¹⁷ During the posttraumatic period, positive religious coping styles such as trust in God as a superior power, the belief that the events they experience occur within the understanding of fate, the expectation that difficulties will be rewarded in the afterlife, and the idea that traumatic events are experienced for testing purposes, may contribute to the individual experiencing more positive psychosocial changes.¹⁸ At the same time, these beliefs can increase the meaning of life through hope and optimism for the future, increase the likelihood of experiencing posttraumatic growth, such as positive changes in relationships with the creator and positive development in interpersonal relationships, as well as a protective function for symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder such as meaninglessness, high levels of anxiety and stress, and

14 Franz Ruppert, *Tavma, Bağlanma ve Aile Konstelasyonları: Ruhun Yaralarını Anlamak ve İyileştirmek*, çev. Fatma Zengin (İstanbul: Kaknüs Yayınları, 2014), 90-101.

15 Richard G. Tedeschi - Lawrence G. Calhoun, "The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory: Measuring the Positive Legacy of Trauma", *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 9/3 (Temmuz 1996), 455-471.

16 Lawrence G. Calhoun vd., "Positive Outcomes Following Bereavement: Paths to Posttraumatic Growth", *Psychologica Belgica* 50/1-2 (Eylül 2010), 125-143.

17 Stephen Joseph - P. Alex Linley, "Positive Adjustment to Threatening Events: An Organismic Valuing Theory of Growth through Adversity", *Review of General Psychology* 9/3 (Eylül 2005), 262-280; Richard G. Tedeschi - Lawrence G. Calhoun, "Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence", *Psychological Inquiry* 15/1 (Ocak 2004), 1-18.

18 Mebrure Doğan, *Acıdan Erdeme Yolculuk Tavma Sonrası Gelişim Psikolojisi ve Din* (İstanbul: Çamlıca Yayınları, 2020), 140-145; Hood vd., *The Psychology of Religion*, 198-199.

disconnections in spiritual life.¹⁹ As a matter of fact, it has been observed that turning to religious and spiritual beliefs during the process of coping with trauma leads to a reduction in posttraumatic stress disorder scores.²⁰ In another study conducted with earthquake survivors, it was observed that there was an increase in posttraumatic growth symptoms with a decrease in hopelessness.²¹

In this study, the effects of devastating event on individuals who have been exposed to mass trauma with the earthquake are discussed. The main purpose of the study is to examine the effect of religious coping resources on the grief process and posttraumatic growth and also to reveal the effect of religious rituals on the grief process. Another aim of the study is to identify the psychosocial changes experienced by individuals who lost their relatives in the earthquake.

4. Method

4.1. Purpose and Questions of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the attitudes of people who lost their relatives due to the earthquake towards the mourning process and the role of religious rituals in combating the stressful situation caused by this loss. In line with this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. Which coping elements (coping, religious coping, social support, psychological treatment etc.) do individuals who lost their relatives due to the earthquake get support from more?
2. What role does religious belief play in the mourning process experienced by individuals who lost their loved ones in the earthquake?
3. Do religious and cultural rituals (funeral and burial procedures, condolences, reading mevlit, etc.) that are performed or not performed after the deceased person after the loss have any effect on the mourning process?
4. In which direction do psychosocial changes (the meaning of death and life, posttraumatic growth, etc.) occur more in individuals who lost their relatives due to the earthquake?

19 Dito Alif Pratama, "The Role of Religion in Dealing with Natural Disaster Trauma: A Case Study of the Survivor of Aceh's Earthquake and Tsunami in 2004", *Empirisma: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Kebudayaan Islam* 32/2 (Temmuz 2023), 300-305.

20 Christian S. Chan - Jean E. Rhodes, "Religious Coping, Posttraumatic Stress, Psychological Distress, and Posttraumatic Growth Among Female Survivors Four Years After Hurricane Katrina", *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 26/2 (2013), 257-265.

21 Ferhat Kardaş - Fuat Tanhan, "Van Depremini Yaşayan Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Travma Sonrası Stres, Travma Sonrası Büyüme ve Umutsuzluk Düzeylerinin İncelenmesi", *Van Yüzyüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi* 15/1 (Kasım 2018), 19-24.

4.2. Research Design

In this study, qualitative research method was adopted. The main purpose of adopting this method is that the study is based on interpretation rather than generalization and provides more in-depth information. The study also adopted a case study design. In the case study design, other factors affecting a phenomenon are addressed.²²

4.3. Characteristics of Research Participants

While the population of the study refers to all the people who lost their relatives due to the February 6 Kahramanmaraş earthquake, the sample is 12 people who lost their relatives in the earthquake. Criterion sampling technique, one of the purposive sampling techniques, was used to determine the participants.²³ The criteria for participating in the study were that the participants had lost any of their relatives in the earthquake, had personally experienced it and at least six months had passed since it. Since it was thought that data saturation was reached in the study, the data collection process was terminated with 12 participants. Participants in the study will be referred to as "P". Participants were between the ages of 19 and 55, with an average age of 33. Seven of the participants were male and five were female. In addition, 8 of them are single, and 4 of them are married. Most of the participants have lost a first-degree relative, and all of them have experienced two or more losses.

4.4. Creation of the Data Collection Tool and Collection Process

In the research, data was collected using the email survey technique, which is one of the modern survey types,²⁴ between 20.06.2023 and 10.08.2023. This method was used specifically because the participants did not want to talk too much due to the loss they experienced; transportation was difficult because the area where the earthquake occurred was very large, and it was aimed getting more participants in a short time. While preparing the research questions, the opinions of an expert psychologist and two experts in the psychology of religion were taken. Four close-ended questions (gender, age, etc.) and 11 open-ended questions were used to collect research data and demographic information. Example for open-ended questions:

"How did you try to cope with this process in order to alleviate its impact?"

"How did your perspective on death and the meaning of life change after your loss?"

22 John W. Creswell - Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2018), 110-127.

23 Ali Yıldırım - Hasan Şimşek, *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri* (Ankara: Seçkin Yayıncılık, 2016), 122-123.

24 Şener Büyüköztürk vd., *Bilimsel Araştırma Yöntemleri* (Ankara: Pegem Akademi, 2013), 54-55.

“What changes did you experience in your religious thoughts and experiences or your prayer life after your loss?”

“How did you feel about attending or not attending the funeral?”

“How did you feel about attending or not attending the condolence ceremony?”.

After editing the survey questions based on feedback from experts, they were sent to 12 participants who agreed to participate in the research using Google Forms. After the participants approved the voluntary participation form, they were allowed to participate in the research. Research data were never shared with third parties.

4.5. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the participants were analysed using content and descriptive analysis methods from qualitative research data analysis methods.²⁵ In order to increase the validity and reliability of the research, some procedures were followed. First, the opinions of 3 experts in the field were taken in order to collect the data in depth. For the research data to represent the entire population, people from different parts of the earthquake zone were tried to participate in the study. The results obtained from the data were shared with two participants who participated in the study and their opinions were also taken into account. The accuracy of the inferences was verified by the participants.²⁶

5. Findings and Analysis

The subthemes and themes obtained from the participants' statements are shown in Table 1.

25 Büyüköztürk vd., *Bilimsel Araştırma Yöntemleri*, 240-245.

26 Yıldırım - Şimşek, *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri*, 299-301.

Table 1. Themes and Subthemes

	First Reactions (for 12 people)	Current Reactions (6 people only)	
Mourning Reactions	Shock	Inability to focus	
	Fear of death	Fear	
	feeling of helplessness	Despair	
	Feeling of terror	Incapability	
	Numbness	Inability to enjoy	
	Disbelief	Insomnia	
	To cry	Heavy smoking	
	Not being able to cry	Crying spells	
	To shout	Disconnection from people	
	Calling People	Psychological distress	
The Meaning Attributed to the Earthquake	During the Earthquake	Currently	
	Bomb	Exam	Punishment
	Attack	God’s Will	Natural phenomenon
	Apocalypse	Evil	Human mistake
Support Resources	Social Support	Professional Support	
	People	Psychiatrist	Psychologist
Religious Coping	Positive Religious Coping	Negative Religious Coping	
	Strengthening your bond with God	Decreased devotion to God	
	Cooperate with God	Spiritual discontent	
	Active religious submission	Thinking that God punishes	
	To worship	Abandoning worship	
Giving religious aid	Questioning the power and might of Allah		
Funeral	Attending the Ceremony	Not Attending the Ceremony	
	Difficulty accepting death	Inability to accept death	
	To say goodbye	Feeling of incompleteness Guiltiness	
Condolence	Attending the Ceremony	Not Attending the Ceremony	
	Accepting death	Despair	
	Alleviation of pain	Lack	
	Not feeling alone	Loneliness	
Perspective on Life	Meaninglessness	Finding Meaning	
Current Psychological State	PostTraumatic Stress Disorder	PostTraumatic Growth	

5.1. First Reactions to Loss

An earthquake can be characterized as a traumatic experience because it leads to the loss of close relationships and leaves people powerless and helpless.²⁷ Acute stress symptoms such as astonishment, shock, panic, fear, anxiety, hopelessness, helplessness, being startled by the slightest sound, feeling like an earthquake is constantly happening during the day, having frightening dreams about the earthquake, not being able to sleep are the first reactions in the mourning process.²⁸ In our study, most of the participants stated that they reacted with fear, fear of death, shock, calling relatives, helplessness, freezing, terror, numbness, disbelief, inability to cry, crying, panic and shouting. The statements of the participants such as; “We thought it was an atomic bomb.” (P2), “We thought there was an attack.” (P4), “We thought a bomb came from Syria.” (P11), “I thought it was the apocalypse.” (P7), “It was like a scene from a horror movie.” (P6) also reflect the severity of the event and the intensity of the emotions experienced.

Acute stress symptoms are expected to be intense in the days after the earthquake. However, if the symptoms persist for more than a month, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) comes to mind.²⁹ According to research, survivors of traumatic experiences often suffer from mental disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety or psychological and/or physical stress symptoms, anxiety disorders, borderline personality disorder and dissociative disorders in the long term.³⁰ Actually, in our study, it was determined that 5 participants (P2, P4, P6, P9, P11) were diagnosed with PTSD by a psychiatrist after the earthquake, and a total of 6 participants were still experiencing negative conditions such as fear, helplessness, hopelessness, inability to enjoy eating and drinking, insomnia, seeing the earthquake in dreams, crying spells, heavy smoking, panic attacks, nail-biting, inability to focus, and disconnection from people six months after the earthquake. This situation can be understood by the fact that these symptoms persist due to reasons such as the high severity of the trauma and people’s lack of access to psychological support resources. In addition, as Yelboğa stated, the suddenness of the loss experienced with this earthquake and the fact that it was not even possible to reach the funeral in some cases deeply affected individuals, causing them to lose their life balance and the mourning process to become

27 Ruppert, *Trauma, Bağlanma ve Aile Konstelasyonları*, 129.

28 Zara, “Kayıplar, Yas Tepkileri ve Yas Süreci”, 73-90.

29 Büşra Yıldız – Ayşe Zeynep Akkoyun, “Deprem Sonrası Psikiyatrik Destek”, *İzmir Kâtip Çelebi Üniversitesi Sağlık Bilimleri Fakültesi Dergisi* 8/2 (2023), 817-820.

30 Giovanna Caia vd., “Container vs. Dacha: The Psychological Effects of Temporary Housing Characteristics on Earthquake Survivors”, *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 30/1 (Mart 2010), 60-66.

traumatic. This situation increases the likelihood of PTSD.³¹ Posttraumatic stress disorder was also observed after the Van earthquake, especially in individuals whose houses were destroyed.³² This situation also points to traumatic grief, which is seen as a result of devastating events such as war and disasters with sudden deaths and is similar to PTSD.³³

5.2. Coping and Religious Coping

When the support sources of the participants were examined, six people (P1, P3, P5, P8, P10, P12) stated that they did not receive professional support, one person (P7) stated that they went to psychotherapy, and five people stated that they went to a psychiatrist and used medication with the diagnosis of PTSD. Considering that the participants had ongoing symptoms for six months, the importance of receiving professional support is clearly seen. Within the scope of psychosocial support, psychosocial interventions that can be applied to mental symptoms that may be seen as a result of trauma in the early period contribute to the normalization process of earthquake survivors and help them endure difficulties.³⁴ Indeed, it has been observed that individuals who are not left alone and supported by their social environment during the grief process are less likely to experience traumatic grief compared to other individuals.³⁵

The support the individual receives from faith is also in the category of social support³⁶. In fact, religion is distinct from other social support systems in that the religious person can communicate with God and other people.³⁷ In this study, seven people stated that they received support mostly from faith, belief, prayer and God, three people (P1, P6, P11) received support from other people and relatives, and two people stated that they did not receive support from anyone (P4, P9). Some statements from these participants are as follows: "I prayed to Allah. You are helpless, you can die. Only Allah can help." (P3), "I prayed to Allah to forgive our deceased. You are helpless and can't do anything. All that remains for a person is faith." (P5), "I received support from

31 Yelboğa, "Kahramanmaraş Depremi ve Travmatik Yas", 97-121.

32 Direnç Sakarya - Cengiz Güneş, "Van Depremi Sonrasında Travma Sonrası Stres Bozukluğu Belirtilerinin Psikolojik Dayanıklılık ile İlişkisi", *Kriz Dergisi* 21/1 (01 Haziran 2013), 25-32.

33 Mardi J. Horowitz vd., "Diagnostic Criteria for Complicated Grief Disorder", *FOCUS* 1/3 (Temmuz 2003), 290-298.

34 Melis Demircioğlu vd., "Psikolojik İlk Yardım: Amaçları, Uygulanışı, Hassas Gruplar ve Uyulması Gereken Etik Kurallar", *Psikiyatride Güncel Yaklaşımlar* 11/3 (30 Eylül 2019), 351-362.

35 Firdevs Savi Çakar, "The Role of Social Support in the Relationship between Adolescents' Level of Loss and Grief and Well-Being", *International Education Studies* 13/12 (2020), 27-40.

36 Kenneth I. Maton - Elizabeth A. Wells, "Religion as a Community Resource for Well-Being: Prevention, Healing, and Empowerment Pathways", *Journal of Social Issues* 51/2 (1995), 177-193.

37 Abdülkerim Bahadır, *İnsanın Anlam Arayışı ve Din* (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2011), 138.

my spouse, friends, and relatives." (P1). "I always tried to be alone with myself." (P4), "I didn't seek support from anyone. I listened to music, went for walks." (P9). Especially in situations such as disasters where people have little control, religious belief can be very supportive in addition to social support. People seek solace by taking refuge in religion, especially in traumatic situations such as war and natural disasters.³⁸

Religious coping is divided into positive and negative. Approaches such as attributing good, believing that troubles have a spiritual meaning and cooperating with God are positive religious coping styles, while approaches such as seeing what happens as a punishment from God and doubting God's power and love are negative religious coping styles.³⁹ In our study, it was observed that 7 of the participants used positive (P2, P3, P5, P7, P8, P10, P12) and 5 of them used negative (P1, P4, P6, P9, P11) religious coping strategies. It was seen that those who used positive religious coping strategies included religion more in their lives before the earthquake and perceived the earthquake as a test or calamity. On the other hand, it was found that people who used negative religious coping strategies gave less importance to religion in their lives (both before and after the earthquake), tended to see the earthquake as a natural event, human error, or punishment, felt intense feelings of helplessness and meaninglessness, and were diagnosed with PTSD. In support of this finding, Pratama (2023), in a study conducted on disaster victims of tsunami and earthquake disasters, found that people who used negative religious coping strategies more often had higher PTSD scores than those who used positive religious coping strategies.⁴⁰ In another study, it was stated that religion and spirituality reduce the anxiety and depression levels of survivors and increase resilience after natural disasters.⁴¹

Negative religious coping styles, such as seeing bad events as God's punishment and spiritual discontentment, negatively affect mental health.⁴² In fact, negative coping styles have been found to be associated with inadequate social relationships, low quality of life, high stress and psychological disorders.⁴³ In our study, four of the participants who used negative religious coping styles were found to have more feelings of helplessness, more difficulty in

38 Ali Ayten, *Tanrı'ya Sığınmak: Dini Başa Çıkma Üzerine Psiko-Sosyal Bir Araştırma* (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2012), 15.

39 Pargament vd., "The Many Methods of Religious Coping", 519-543.

40 Pratama, "The Role of Religion in Dealing with Natural Disaster Trauma", 287-295.

41 Thema Bryant-Davis - Eunice C. Wong, "Faith to Move Mountains: Religious Coping, Spirituality, and Interpersonal Trauma Recovery", *American Psychologist* 68/8 (2013), 675-680.

42 Kenneth I. Pargament vd., "Religious Coping Among the Religious: The Relationships Between Religious Coping and Well-Being in a National Sample of Presbyterian Clergy, Elders, and Members", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40/3 (2001), 497-498.

43 Laura B. Cooper vd., "Differentiated Styles of Attachment to God and Varying Religious Coping Efforts", *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 37/2 (Haziran 2009), 134-141.

accepting death, shaken beliefs, disconnection from God, and abandonment of worship. It was observed that these people did not show any continuity in worship before the earthquake and had difficulty continuing their worship after the earthquake. The statements of the participants are as follows: “Why did God put us through this? It feels very heavy.” (P4), “After what I have seen, I am no longer a living person. It makes no sense for a dead person to worship.” (P6), “Before the earthquake, I was more connected to God. Now, it is like this connection is broken. I cannot accept the deaths of so many people. How can a creator allow tiny children to freeze in the cold?” (P9), “Seeing the bodies of children opened great wounds in my faith. I used to pray occasionally, but now I don’t pray at all; I feel empty” (P11). Here, it is seen how much child deaths affect individuals and shake their beliefs because the loss of a child is the most difficult loss,⁴⁴ and we cannot accept the loss of a child as normal and natural as the death of an adult.⁴⁵ Parents, in particular, may feel more guilty because they feel obliged to protect the child, even from death, if necessary.⁴⁶ However, in our study, there was 1 participant who lost his/her child and spouse, and it was observed that this participant had a positive grief process by actively using positive religious coping methods and receiving social support. Participants who used negative religious coping were found to experience PTSD symptoms more intensely. Two of these participants (P4, P9) stated that they tried to be alone, listened to music, and took walks to cope. These methods alone were insufficient for trauma of this severity. In situations where there is little control, it is more effective to leave control to God instead of self-oriented coping.⁴⁷ Indeed, if a person gives up hope in God, the coping process can be negatively affected, as we have seen. In another study, it was found that participants mostly tried to gain control through active religious submission. This is because death is something to be accepted, not solved.⁴⁸ Active religious surrender refers to taking responsibility while relinquishing control to God. In this way, the person is relieved by the cognitive change achieved by mobilizing his or her religious beliefs.⁴⁹

In our study, 7 participants who used positive religious coping styles stated that they experienced positive changes in their religious thoughts and

44 Vamık Volkan - Elizabeth Zintl, *Gidenin Ardından*, çev. Işıl Vahip - Müge Kocadere (İstanbul: Epsilon Matbaası, 2003), 93.

45 Nil Gün, *Küçük Siyah Yas Kitabı* (İstanbul: Kuraldışı Yayınları, 2014), 24-26.

46 Volkan - Zintl, *Gidenin Ardından*, 44.

47 Kenneth I. Pargament - C. Brant, *Handbook of Religion and Mental Health*, ed. Harold G. Koenig (San Diego: Academic Press, 1998), 134.

48 Volkan - Zintl, *Gidenin Ardından*, 44; Ayşe Gökmen, *Yas ve Dini Başa Çıkma: Klinik Bir Örneklem Değerlendirmesi* (Rize: Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2019), 137.

49 Brenda Cole - Kenneth Pargament, “Re-Creating Your Life: A Spiritual/Psychotherapeutic Intervention for People Diagnosed with Cancer”, *Psycho-Oncology* 8/5 (1999), 395-407.

behaviours. These participants reported positive changes in their religious thoughts and behaviours, which also included some posttraumatic growth behaviours such as praying, trying not to break hearts, helping those in need of the forgiveness of the sins of their deceased relatives, tidying themselves up, paying more attention to halal and haram in human relations and commercial relations, and feeling the presence of Allah deeply: "I have never felt so strongly that there is no guarantee that we will survive tomorrow." (P2), "I used to worship before, but now that I feel the power and might of Allah, my worship has gained more meaning. I worship more willingly now." (P12). When these statements are analyzed, it is seen that facing the reality of death and witnessing God's power might positively affect the participants, and they acted submissively. Indeed, a study found that experiencing an encounter with the reality of mortality led individuals with a positive perception of God to engage in more worship and prayer and that the inclination to worship increased as death anxiety increased.⁵⁰ Our study also found an increase in worship among individuals who use positive religious coping styles. Therefore, the awareness of mortality, reminding of God's omnipotence, protects the mental health of traumatized individuals.⁵¹ Indeed, the obedient individual will not feel hopeless and inadequate because of his faith and trust in God, and he will be healthy and balanced.⁵²

5.3. Perspective on the Meaning of Life

After a traumatic experience such as an earthquake that causes multiple losses, individuals feel hopeless and helpless, experience a deeper grief and go through a more challenging mourning process. With the Kahramanmaraş earthquake, it is seen that many people do not see the world as a safe place, suffer from loss of meaning, have difficulty in adapting and fulfilling their life tasks, and sever their ties with life and other people.⁵³ In our study, it was determined that the perspective of 6 participants was negatively affected in general (P1, P4, P6, P7, P9, P11), and 4 of them felt intensely meaningless and withdrew from social relations. "Since the people who gave meaning to my life died, life has no meaning, I feel empty." (P7), "I had no one but my mother and brother. They were my everything. I feel like I have lost everything. Life has never felt so meaningless. I don't even want to see anyone." (P9). As can be understood from the participants' statements, the degree of closeness to

50 Ümmahan Esra Ceylan, *Ölümlülük Bilincinin Dini Başa Çıkma, Tanrı Algısı, Ölüm Kaygısı ve Psikolojik İyi Olma ile İlişkisi* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2020), 121-136.

51 Newton vd., "Assessing Giftedness in Children", 523-536.

52 Ali Rıza Aydın, "İnanma İhtiyacı ve Dinî Ritüellerin Psikolojik Değeri", *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 9/2 (01 Nisan 2009), 87-100.

53 Yelboğa, "Kahramanmaraş Depremi ve Travmatik Yas", 97-121.

the deceased affects the grieving process. The closer the connection, the more intense the emotions.⁵⁴ In Kara's study, it was found that the severity of grief reactions increased as the degree of closeness to the deceased person increased, and negative religious coping styles were used more frequently.⁵⁵ However, religious coping is known to be more effective when a loved one dies.⁵⁶

Factors such as the individual's beliefs, mindset, environment and developmental stage⁵⁷ influence their attitude towards death and, consequently, the way they make sense of death. The believer interacts with religion the most in the process of making sense of death.⁵⁸ The stronger an individual's spirituality, the more likely he or she is to cope with difficulties and accept what is beyond his or her power.⁵⁹ In our study, factors such as the use of negative religious coping by some participants and the lack of positive coping behaviours, such as worshipping before and after the earthquake, may have increased their feelings of meaninglessness and prevented them from accepting what happened. In addition, the lack of ceremonies such as funerals and condolences may have negatively affected the meaning-making process of individuals. Indeed, in another study, it was observed that factors such as the lack of clarity about death and the absence of a funeral ceremony prevented the individual from accepting death and living his/her life.⁶⁰

In addition to the 6 participants whose perspective on life was negatively affected, the other 6 participants stated that their perspectives were positively affected as follows; "You realize that the world is a very empty place. We are bothering ourselves with small and meaningless things." (P2), "You feel that death exists at any moment and that you can die at any moment. You learn not to worship the world. There is another life waiting for you after death; you get yourself in order. You pay more attention to your relationship with God." (P3), "I realized that I was living life empty, I was living far from God, disconnected from God. I used to not pray much. Now, I try to fulfil my duties towards God more. I pray for my relatives, read the Qur'an, do charity." (P5). In addition to all these, it was observed that the participants also received

54 Volkan - Zintl, *Gidenin Ardından*, 20-21.

55 Elif Kara, "A Qualitative Research on University Students' Religious Approaches During the Grieving Process", *Spiritual Psychology and Counseling* 2/2 (15 Ağustos 2017), 203-207.

56 Kenneth I. Pargament, "Acı ve Tatlı: Dindarlığın Bedelleri ve Faydaları Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme", çev. A. Ulvi Mehmedoğlu, *Çukurova Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 5/1 (Haziran 2005), 296.

57 Hayati Hökekleli, *Ölüm, Ölüm Ötesi Psikolojisi ve Din* (İstanbul: Değerler Eğitimi Merkezi Yayınları, 2008), 26-33.

58 Bahadır, *İnsanın Anlam Arayışı ve Din*, 137.

59 Aydın, "İnanma İhtiyacı ve Dinî Ritüellerin Psikolojik Değeri", 87-100.

60 Tuba Özpulat Olgun, *Travmatik Kayıpların Ardından Gelişen Yas Sürecini Belirleyen Etmenler* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi, Tıp Fakültesi, Tıpta Uzmanlık Tezi, 1999).

support from the belief in the hereafter. Belief in the hereafter enables people to find the strength to endure all the negativities they experience in the world.⁶¹ Belief in the afterlife makes one hopeful by making one believe that life has meaning.⁶² “Going to my mother’s grave, thinking that she hears me, that she listens to me, knowing that death is not annihilation, that those who die pass on to another life, and thinking that they are in heaven gives some consolation.” (P7), “Faith gives me hope that I will see my deceased relatives.” (P10), “Faith in God kept me alive. Otherwise, the body cannot bear this pain...The only thing that gives strength is faith. Knowing that your loved ones are going to heaven keeps you alive at that moment.” (P12) As can be seen in their statements, belief in the afterlife can both enable people to endure the reality of death and increase their worship by increasing their belief that this world is temporary.⁶³ In a study conducted by Köse and Küçükcan on earthquake victims, it was observed that the majority of the people who suffered loss thought that the Creator would treat their relatives with love and compassion in the afterlife and that they would meet their loved ones again, contributed to a healthier mourning process.⁶⁴

Since religion or faith can offer explanations where people are left without solutions, individuals turn to religion to gain meaning and develop a sense of control in situations they cannot control and overcome.⁶⁵ In our study, it was observed that half of the participants turned to faith and used positive religious coping styles to make sense of and cope with situations such as earthquakes and death that people cannot solve. In another study, it was determined that individuals who experienced loss gave more place to religious beliefs in their meaning systems while reinterpreting life, realized the transience of the world, thought more about the hereafter, and considered negative feelings and thoughts unnecessary.⁶⁶ In another study, it was observed that individuals who used positive religious coping both made sense of life more easily and had more energy to do things.⁶⁷ As can be seen, religion answers the questions of individuals who experience disaster, gives them hope and increases their resilience. Thus, it helps them regain a positive worldview.⁶⁸

61 Hayati Hökelekli, *İslam Psikolojisi Yazıları* (İstanbul: Dem Yayınları, 2012), 150.

62 Latif Tokat, *Anlam Sorunu* (Ankara: Elis Yayınları, 2014), 155.

63 Işık, *Sen Öldün Ben Büyüdüm*.

64 Ali Köse - Talip Küçükcan, *Deprem ve Din: Marmara Depremi Üzerine Psiko-Sosyolojik Bir İnceleme* (İstanbul: Emre Yayınları, 2006), 110-137.

65 Pargament - Brant, *Handbook of Religion and Mental Health*, 112.

66 Işık, *Sen Öldün Ben Büyüdüm*, 197.

67 Sema Eryücel, *Yaşam Olayları ve Dini Başa Çıkma* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2018), 124.

68 Bryant-Davis - Wong, “Faith to Move Mountains”, 675-680.

The contribution of losses to the spiritual maturation of individuals⁶⁹ can be considered posttraumatic growth. Some people develop stronger ways of coping in order to cope with the pain and rebuild their lives. People who are able to do this have been found to have increased levels of compassion, improved human relationships and a positive outlook on life.⁷⁰ Indeed, according to Lykins, posttraumatic growth generally includes situations such as changing one's priorities in life, feeling stronger than before, establishing closer relationships with other people, increasing awareness of new opportunities, increasing desire to live a more satisfying life, and increasing spiritual development and maturation.⁷¹ In our study, it was determined that individuals with posttraumatic growth symptoms generally used positive religious coping styles more, their perspective on life was positively affected, their awareness increased in general, their human relations improved, they became more aware of the transience of the world, and they preferred psychosocial behaviours such as helping more. In addition, in our study, it was determined that individuals who used negative religious coping styles showed more intense PTSD symptoms, while individuals who used positive religious coping styles did not experience PTSD and even showed more posttraumatic growth symptoms. In another study conducted with earthquake survivors, it was observed that early posttraumatic growth symptoms both alleviated PTSD symptoms and helped adaptation.⁷²

5.4. Religious Rituals and Their Impact on the Mourning Process

Sudden and traumatic deaths are much more difficult to accept. At this point, it is important to be able to reach the body. In this study, it was determined that 11 participants had all their relatives found, and 1 participant (P4) had both found and not found relatives. Although the participants' relatives were found, it was determined that they gave reactions such as not believing that they were dead, not accepting death, and crying. Although this supports the natural mourning process, the fact that they still experience similar symptoms may be related to the severity of the event, its unexpectedness, the level of trauma, and the uncertainty experienced due to not being able to reach the dead immediately. As a matter of fact, the relatives of most of the participants were found days after the earthquake. According to Yelboğa, situations such

69 Işık, *Sen Öldün Ben Büyüdüm*, 151-152.

70 Tedeschi - Calhoun, "The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory", 455-460.

71 Emily L. B. Lykins vd., "Goal Shifts Following Reminders of Mortality: Reconciling Posttraumatic Growth and Terror Management Theory", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 33/8 (Ağustos 2007), 1088-1095.

72 Jieliang Chen vd., "Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms and Post-Traumatic Growth: Evidence from a Longitudinal Study Following an Earthquake Disaster", *PLOS ONE* 10/6 (05 Haziran 2015), 1-10.

as the suddenness of the death, the dismemberment of the bodies, and the inability to find the bodies prevent the mourning process from continuing in its normal course and pathologize the mourning process.⁷³

Cemetery visits are important in terms of facing the death of your loved one and relaxing over time. Two participants (P7, P8) stated that they were even happy that the bodies were found because their relatives would have a grave where they could pray. However, it is understood that the mass burial of those who died due to the earthquake was shocking for people: "They just gave a grave number and buried him. I could not see him for the last time, I cannot accept his death." (P9). Therefore, as Yelboğa states, undertaking tasks such as washing, shrouding, and burial is also important for the individual to experience a healthy mourning process.⁷⁴ Indeed, two participants at the funeral said, "At least we were able to do our last duty."

In addition, it was determined that the relatives of 5 participants were not with them when they were present. When the statements of these participants are examined, it is seen that while one participant was grateful that the funeral prayer was performed without waiting for the funeral prayer and burial procedures to be realized, the others had difficulty believing and accepting death. Therefore, participation in the funeral ceremony is also very important at the point of accepting death. In this study, it was determined that seven people were able to attend the funeral, three people (P1, P4, P9) were not able to attend, and two people (P3, P10) were able to attend some of the funerals but not others. Looking at the statements of those who attended the funeral, it is clear from the following statement that some participants are still confused in terms of the way of death and what happened; "I felt strange as if we took people out of their graves and buried them again." (P11). Some participants expressed their gratitude for what they could do under limited conditions as follows: "It's like an apocalypse, when thousands of people are dead, you are even grateful that you buried them." (P3), "Everyone was lost. Even the one whose funeral was washed was thankful." (P10).

Under normal circumstances, religious rituals or ceremonies performed for the deceased contribute to an easier acceptance of death and positively affect the mourning process.⁷⁵ Because the individual in shock may not have felt the reality of the loss until the funeral,⁷⁶ actually, it is understood from the above statements that the participants were in shock and how unreal they felt. For this reason, attending the funeral, seeing the deceased and accepting condolences are important accepting the death.⁷⁷ For example, in one study, the

73 Yelboğa, "Kahramanmaraş Depremi ve Travmatik Yas", 97-121.

74 Yelboğa, "Kahramanmaraş Depremi ve Travmatik Yas", 97-121.

75 Adnan Özçetin, "Diyarbakır'da Yas ve Din İlişkisi", *Düşünen Adam Dergisi* 13/1 (2000), 12-18.

76 Gün, *Küçük Siyah Yas Kitabı*, 31.

77 Volkan - Zintl, *Gidenin Ardından*, 37.

majority of the participants who lost their relatives suddenly stated that they felt both the death of their relatives and the reality of death the most at the funeral ceremony.⁷⁸ However, in this study, the participants who attended the funeral indicated that only the burial process was carried out rather than a full funeral ceremony, and most of the participants frequently expressed that they could not accept death. Therefore, factors such as incomplete funeral ceremonies and fewer people at the funeral may have been an obstacle to the positive effects of having a funeral.

When the expressions of those who could not attend the funeral are examined, the intensity of emotion, the feeling of incompleteness, the inability to accept, as well as feeling guilty for not being able to do their last duty stand out: "I couldn't even read a Fatiha after him, I couldn't see him for the last time, I couldn't say goodbye." (P4), "It's like a dream, like he went on vacation and will come back, like one day we will go on a picnic together again... I feel like I couldn't do my last duty." (P3), "Many emotions were missing, we couldn't say goodbye. Only my mother recited Yasin at the grave. These are all shortcomings..." (P6). The situation of not being able to say goodbye and not being able to perform the last duty is important here. In the case of sudden deaths, not being able to be with the deceased in their last moments and not being able to say goodbye can make grief more traumatic⁷⁹. Therefore, funeral ceremonies are important for a healthy grief process in terms of providing acceptance and social support. It has been determined that the support given to individuals experiencing loss at funeral ceremonies and condolence houses facilitates the mourning process.⁸⁰ Therefore, the condolence ceremony to be held after the funeral is also important for a healthy mourning process. However, 8 of the participants stated that they could not hold a ceremony, one participated in the condolence ceremony in the village (P10), two (P8, P12) in another city, and one (P5) among the family.

Going to a house of condolence helps the individual to accept the reality of death.⁸¹ Actually, the participants who attended the condolence expressed that they shared the pain, did not feel alone, accepted death more easily, their pain eased, and they prayed as follows: "Even thinking that the sermons and prayers read there went to those close to him/her calms you down." (P5), "In such things, you realize that you are not alone. Condolences eased our pain to some extent." (P8). In a study conducted by Özçetin, it was observed that condolence ceremonies, which are religious and cultural rituals in which the deceased is spoken about, prayers are said, chapters from the holy book are

78 Gökmen, *Yas ve Dini Başa Çıkma*, 156.

79 Yelboğa, "Kahramanmaraş Depremi ve Travmatik Yas", 97-110.

80 Işık, *Sen Öldün Ben Büyüdüm*, 110.

81 Volkan - Zintl, *Gidenin Ardından*, 12-13.

read, and visits expressing social support to the relatives left behind, contributing to a healthier mourning process for people experiencing loss.⁸²

As can be seen, condolence ceremonies function as an important social support mechanism to prevent individuals experiencing loss from being alone. It has been determined that individuals who feel lonely show more depressive symptoms.⁸³ In this study, it was observed that participants who could not make condolences felt loneliness, helplessness and incompleteness: "When there is no condolence, it is as if the deceased was not your relative, as if you could not do your last duty towards him/her." (P4), "At that moment, all the pain remains with you. It's like having to eat a bitter fruit that has no taste all by yourself." (P7), "It's like a wounded person trying to treat his wound by himself without any support from anyone." (P9), "I couldn't talk to anyone, I closed in on myself." (P11). As can be seen, individuals were deprived of the comforting effect of rituals due to the inability to perform rituals due to the lack of appropriate conditions. This may have caused them to experience the traumatic grief process for a longer period to develop PTSD and to be deprived of posttraumatic growth. An individual who is trapped between intense negative emotions and traumatic experiences can maintain a state of mourning for a long time, so these individuals are likely to experience traumatic grief.⁸⁴

In addition to all these, the participants were asked whether there was anything else that they felt they lacked in religious terms compared to losses in normal times. First of all, they stated that they perceived the loss as more devastating, that their pain was not alleviated because they could not share their pain, that they felt hopelessness and helplessness, and that it was painful not to be able to say goodbye and hear their last wishes. Therefore, it can be said that the participants are still experiencing intense emotions. Other studies have also found that mental disorders and pathological grief symptoms following traumatic losses are more severe than the expected losses that occur in the ordinary course of life.⁸⁵ In the specific case of the earthquake, some religious and cultural rituals that are deprived of social support and cannot be fulfilled after the death of the deceased cause the situation expressed as "disenfranchised grief".⁸⁶ This can lead to a further pathologization of the grieving

82 Özçetin, "Diyarbakır'da Yas ve Din İlişkisi", 12-18.

83 Nesrin Çunkuş vd., "Hemşirelik Bölümü Öğrencilerinde Depresif Belirtiler ve Umutsuzluk Düzeyi ile İlişkili Faktörler", *Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi Sağlık Bilimleri Fakültesi Dergisi* 4/1 (Haziran 2021), 6-14.

84 Yelboğa, "Kahramanmaraş Depremi ve Travmatik Yas", 97-105.

85 Olgun, *Traumatik Kayıpların Ardından Gelişen Yas Sürecini Belirleyen Etmeler*.

86 Kenneth J. Doka, "Disenfranchised Grief", *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognizing Hidden Sorrow*, ed. Kenneth J. Doka (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1989), 153.

process for those left behind⁸⁷. In the Kahramanmaraş earthquake, the inability to fulfil rituals related to death and mass burials negatively affected the mourning process of individuals.⁸⁸ Actually, in our study, the participants expressed that they felt incomplete in the religious sense because they buried their relatives in a hurry, they could not make condolences, they could not pray, they could not perform their last duties, they could not make peace, and in general they could not fulfil their religious duties: “In the normal loss, you feel sad, but it is not so devastating. You can get support from people. Here, they give the body in a bag. You bury it with strangers. You ask if it is my relative I buried. No condolences, no prayers, nothing. You can’t do your religious duties, but on the other hand, you are grateful that you buried the body when it is a life market.” (P1), “There is not even a grave to pray over.” (P8).

Conclusion

As a result of the findings obtained from this study, it was determined that the losses that occurred because of the earthquake had more devastating effects on the participants compared to other losses that occurred in the course of life, and this situation led to the emergence of more traumatic grief symptoms in the participants. Actually, half of the participants stated that they received professional support.

In terms of social support sources, it was observed that half of the participants received support from people and the other half from faith, and they tended to receive support from religious beliefs the most in the coping process. Here, it was observed that individuals who used positive religious coping styles were in active religious submission and cooperation with God, accepted death more easily, included religion in their lives before the earthquake, and experienced positive religious thought and behaviour changes after the earthquake, such as an increase in worship and helping behaviours. In addition, posttraumatic growth symptoms such as paying attention to human relations and developing their own personality can be mentioned. Therefore, it can be said that positive religious coping positively affects the grief process, while negative religious coping interrupts the grief process. Indeed, it was observed that most of the individuals who used negative religious coping styles, such as experiencing more spiritual discontentment, doubting God’s power and might, quitting worship, not having intense religious experiences

87 Charles A. Corr, “Enhancing the Concept of Disenfranchised Grief”, *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying* 38/1 (Şubat 1999), 1-20.

88 Yelboğa, “Kahramanmaraş Depremi ve Travmatik Yas”, 97-100.

before the earthquake, felt more helplessness, meaninglessness, had more difficulty in accepting death, withdrew from social relations and showed more intense PTSD symptoms.

Participation in religious ceremonies is important in the mourning process. Although most of the participants attended the funeral, it was observed that factors such as hasty burial, lack of proper procedures, and few people at the ceremony prevented the positive effects of the funeral ceremony and that the participants had difficulty in accepting death. Participants who did not attend the ceremony felt unfinished, could not accept deaths, and felt guilty for not being able to do their last duty. Similar situations are also valid for the condolence ceremony. Although most of the participants attended the funeral ceremony, they could not attend because there was no condolence ceremony. Participants who could not attend the ceremony expressed that they felt loneliness, helplessness, and incompleteness. A small number of participants who participated in the condolence ceremony stated that they alleviated the pain by sharing it, that they did not feel alone and that they accepted death more easily. Therefore, it can be said that duly conducted funeral and condolence ceremonies have an important function in fulfilling religious responsibilities, accepting death, sharing grief by receiving social support and contributing to a healthy mourning ; otherwise, they negatively affect the mourning process.

This study has some limitations. Since it was conducted with a limited sample group and using a qualitative method, the results are not generalizable. From this point of view, it can be said that there is a need for longitudinal, quantitative, and mixed studies that include people who have lost their relatives as a result of the earthquake in addition to the current study. In addition, some suggestions can be made for the postearthquake society. First, religious support services should be strengthened, and easy access should be provided. Second, professional counselling services that can contribute to emotional support and recovery processes should be made more widespread. Third, encouraging proper observance and participation in funeral and condolence ceremonies can support a positive grieving process. Finally, training programs for religious leaders, clergy, spiritual counsellors and social workers can help them provide effective support in a more professional manner.

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The Effects of Religious Rituals and Religious Coping Methods on the Grief Process and Posttraumatic Growth: A Qualitative Study

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Araştırma Notu Bilgi Formu

Yazarların Katkıları

Makaleye Ayşe Gökmen %50, Said Sami %50 katkı sağlamıştır.

Çıkar Çatışması Bildirimi

Yazarlar tarafından potansiyel çıkar çatışması bildirilmemiştir.

Destek/Destekleyen Kuruluşlar

Bu araştırma için herhangi bir kamu kuruluşundan, kâr amacı gütmeyen veya özel sektörlerden hibe alınmamıştır.

Etik Onay ve Katılımcı Rızası

"The Effects of Religious Rituals and Religious Coping Methods on the Grief Process and Posttraumatic Growth: A Qualitative Study" başlıklı çalışma için Gaziantep Üniversitesi Rektörlüğü, Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Etik Kurulundan 06.06.2023 tarihli E-87841438-302.08.01-339044 sayılı kararıyla izin alınmıştır ve çalışmanın yazım sürecinde bilimsel etik ve alıntı kurallarına uyulmuş olup toplanan veriler üzerinde hiçbir tahrifat yapılmamıştır. Herhangi bir etik ihlalle karşılaşılması durumunda *Sakarya Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*'nin yükümlülüğü olmayıp tüm sorumluluk yazara aittir.