

Research Article

“No Support Came for My Neighbourhood, My Family or Me”: People with Disabilities during the Disaster Process and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)*

“Mahalleme de Aileme de Bana da Destek Gelmedi”: Afet Sürecinde Engelli Bireyler ve Afet Risk Azaltma Sistemi (ARAS)

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Article Information	Abstract
Article History <u>Received:</u> 07.04.2026 <u>Accepted:</u> 29.06.2026 <u>Published:</u> 01.09.2026	Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore the views of people with disabilities regarding their experiences of the difficulties they face during a disaster as a form of discrimination specific to their particular circumstances. Method: To this end, the data collected in the study were obtained through face-to-face interviews conducted in 2023–2024 with individuals aged 30 and over who have orthopaedic, hearing, and visual impairments and who experienced the 23 October 2011 Van earthquakes whilst residing in the central districts of Van. Findings: It was found that the participants in the study held differing views regarding whether they had been subjected to discrimination during the earthquake experience. However, it was generally understood that they believed they had faced discrimination due to their disability, felt helpless, experienced discrimination based on their ethnic origin, felt they had experienced gender discrimination, and emphasised that earthquake relief aid had not reached them in the same way as it had reached other people with disabilities individuals, regardless of any special conditions. Conclusion: The research has shown that people with disabilities perceive the difficulties they face during a disaster as discrimination. It is believed that the findings of the research, when combined with the participants’ own experiences and suggestions, contribute to the development of the Disaster Risk Reduction System (DRRS).
Keywords 2011 Van Earthquakes Disaster Disaster Risk Reduction System Discrimination People with Disabilities	

* This article was derived from the master’s thesis entitled “Disaster Experiences of People with Disabilities: The Case of Van,” completed in 2024 at the Department of Sociology, Institute of Social Sciences, Van Yüzüncü Yıl University.

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Makale Bilgisi	Öz
Makale Tarihçesi <u>Geliş Tarihi:</u> 07.04.2026 <u>Kabul Tarihi:</u> 29.06.2026 <u>Yayınlanma Tarihi:</u> 01.09.2026	Amaç: Bu araştırmanın amacı engelli bireylerin afet sürecinde yaşadıkları zorlukları kendi özel durumlarına yönelik bir ayrımcılık olarak değerlendirmeye dair düşüncelerini ortaya koymaktır. Yöntem: Bu amaçla, çalışmada toplanan veriler Van merkez ilçelerinde ikamet eden 23 Ekim 2011 Van depremlerini yaşamış 30 yaş üstü ortopedik, işitme ve görme engelli bireylerle 2023-2024 yıllarında gerçekleştirilen yüzyüze mülakatlar yoluyla sağlanmıştır. Bulgular: Yaşadıkları deprem sürecinde ayrımcılığa maruz kalıp kalmadıkları konusunda çalışmada yer alan katılımcıların, birbirinden farklı fikirlere sahip oldukları anlaşılmıştır. Ancak genel olarak engelli oldukları için ayrımcılığa uğradıklarını düşündükleri, kendilerini çaresiz hissettikleri, etnik kökenleri nedeniyle ayrımcılık gördükleri, cinsiyet ayrımcılığı yaşadıklarını hissettikleri ve herhangi bir özel duruma bağlı kalmadan diğer sağlıklı bireyler gibi kendilerine de depremzede yardımlarının ulaştırılmadığını vurguladıkları anlaşılmıştır. Sonuç: Araştırma, engelli bireylerin afet sürecinde yaşadıkları zorlukları ayrımcılık olarak değerlendirdiklerini göstermiştir. Araştırmanın sonuçlarının, katılımcıların kendi deneyim ve önerileriyle birleştirilerek Afet Risk Azaltma Sistemi'nin (ARAS) geliştirilmesine katkı sunduğu düşünülmektedir.
Anahtar Kelimeler 2011 Van Depremi Afet Afet Risk Azaltma Sistemi Ayrımcılık Engelli Bireyler	

Introduction

Being a person with a disability often leads to serious difficulties in evacuation, shelter and access to basic needs due to physical (orthopaedical), hearing, visual or intellectual impairments, and results in an increased sense of helplessness. People with disabilities face higher levels of risk and vulnerability compared to others in relation to access to medicines, medical supplies and accessible shelters, both during and after a disaster.

Accessibility issues, such as difficulties in exiting rubble, reaching safe assembly points, and living spaces in tent or container camps not being suitable for people with disabilities; communication and information access issues, such as disaster warnings not being provided in formats suitable for people with hearing or visual impairments, such as sign language or audio description; health and medication access issues, such as those with chronic illnesses or who require medical devices like wheelchairs or hearing aids being unable to access these supplies; and the need for support during the post-disaster period, when psychological effects such as feelings of helplessness, fear and inadequacy are experienced more intensely, constitute the fundamental needs and risks for people with disabilities in disasters.

This study presents the views of individuals aged 30 and over with orthopaedic, hearing and visual impairments—who experienced the 23 October 2011 Van earthquakes and reside in the central districts of Van—regarding their perception of the difficulties they faced during the disaster as a form of discrimination specific to their particular conditions. These findings were obtained through face-to-face interviews conducted between 2023 and 2024. Through this study, it is also intended to contribute

to the development of a Disaster Risk Reduction System (DRRS) that places the challenges faced by people with disabilities at its core.

Theoretical background

Disasters are known as events that disrupt daily life, can lead to loss of life and property, and cause an imbalance between humans and the environment. When natural or technological hazards combine with risk and vulnerability, destructive disasters can occur. In recent years, particularly in developing countries, disasters have become more frequent due to increasing economic, sociological, environmental and physical vulnerabilities (Varol & Kırıkkaya, 2017: 1). Disaster risk reduction aims to prevent new disaster risks, reduce existing disaster risks and manage residual risks; all of these contribute to strengthening resilience and, consequently, to achieving sustainable development.

According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) (2017), disaster risk reduction is the policy objective of disaster risk management, and its objectives and targets are defined in disaster risk reduction strategies and plans. Strategies and policies for disaster risk reduction define objectives and targets across different timeframes, with specific goals, indicators and timeframes. In line with the 2015–2030 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, these should aim to prevent the occurrence of disaster risk, reduce existing risk, and strengthen economic, social, health and environmental resilience.

A global and agreed-upon disaster risk reduction policy is set out in the 2015–2030 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, which was adopted in March 2015 and endorsed by the United Nations; the expected outcome of this framework over the next 15 years is as follows: “A significant reduction in disaster risk and in the losses to lives, livelihoods and health, as well as to the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of individuals, businesses, communities and countries” (UNDRR, 2017)

It is known that the Sendai Framework (2015–2030) proposes solutions to address existing gaps in knowledge, innovation and education, and to ensure the effective implementation of disaster resilience education at all levels (Varol & Kırıkkaya, 2017: 4). In their work, Varol and Kırıkkaya (2017: 4) state: “In light of these global roadmaps, countries must review their disaster risk management systems, identify hazards and risks, raise public awareness, prioritise cooperation in the event of disasters, and implement risk reduction strategies at every level to ensure they are prepared for potential disasters. Consequently, they must create disaster-resilient societies and resilient systems.”

Researchers studying the effects of disasters on individuals take into account the intersections between exposure to risk, the quality of human settlements and the built

environment, socio-economic status, gender, ethnic origin, age, disability and health status. Researchers in this field have demonstrated that women and men are affected by disasters in different ways and to varying degrees, and that there are also differences in their coping mechanisms and resilience (Erman et al., 2021; Neumayer. & Plümper, 2007; Bradshaw, 2004; J Moreno & Shaw, 2018; cited in Çabuk Kaya, 2023: 273).

Researchers also refer to ‘vulnerable groups’ comprising the poor, women, ethnic minorities, people with physical or mental disabilities, the elderly and children. Individuals in this group are considered to be more susceptible to loss of life, suffering and injury, and to be more severely affected by the damage that may result from disasters (Wisner et al., 2004; Peek, 2008; cited in Sırma, 2023: 386).

Individuals with disabilities encounter numerous barriers in their everyday lives, shaped by a range of structural and attitudinal determinants. When they are confronted with an extraordinary disaster situation, these factors may further increase their vulnerability to the impacts of that disaster (Demir, 2020: 273). In their research focusing on the difficulties experienced by individuals with special needs who are intellectually disadvantaged and their parents—who belong to vulnerable groups—following the 2011 Van earthquakes, Bilik and Akdağ (2023: 254) noted that, although placed in temporary accommodation at a later stage, individuals with special needs and their families found these facilities unsuitable for their needs; they experienced significant difficulties, particularly regarding the meeting of their toilet and bathing needs; and that individuals with special needs and their parents, who struggled to integrate into a new social environment within the accommodation, were occasionally excluded. The majority of participants encountered difficulties accessing the in-kind and cash aid distributed. The research also reveals that individuals with special needs, who experience difficulties accessing public services even during normal times, face these issues to a greater extent during disasters (Bilik & Akdağ, 2023: 254).

One of the most significant barriers preventing persons with disabilities from existing in the social sphere as independent individuals is discriminatory practices. These practices constitute an important factor that reduces the effectiveness of anti-discrimination policies implemented at both national and international levels. It is stated that ensuring the effectiveness and continuity of anti-discrimination measures plays a decisive role in minimizing the discriminatory attitudes and behaviours to which persons with disabilities are exposed (Erol-Karaca & Nam, 2021: 186).

In order for persons with disabilities to develop resilience and coping capacity against disasters, they must be actively included in disaster-related processes without being subjected to discrimination, like other members of society, and must not be perceived merely as individuals “in need of assistance.” It is argued that resilience capacity can be strengthened through proper organization, communication, and cooperation (Açıkalin Rashem & Aslangiri, 2019: 80).

Therefore, it is important that persons with disabilities play an active role in all phases of disaster processes without being exposed to discrimination, and that they are included as decision-making actors in the development of relevant training, policies, and practices.

In order to enable the use of different methods in disaster, hazard and risk analyses, to produce maps that are as accurate as possible, and to ensure that analyses are conducted within the same environment, stored on the same platform and made available for sharing, the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Türkiye initiated the Disaster Risk Analysis System (DRRS) Project in 2017: the objective is to conduct risk assessments using statistical analyses following the identification of hazards (AFAD, 2026). This study, however, aims to contribute to the literature by proposing that, in addition to statistical analyses, qualitative data can also provide significant datasets for risk determination.

Methodology

The aim of this study is to explore the views of people with disabilities regarding their experiences during a disaster as a form of discrimination specific to their particular condition. To this end, in-depth face-to-face interviews—a qualitative research technique—were conducted, and the findings were transcribed and analysed.

Qualitative research is a method that affords researchers flexibility regarding the research problem and data collection. Similarly, it enables researchers to engage with participants during the data collection process. This interaction “enables the examination of social phenomena and the meaningful actions of actors within their natural contexts, and facilitates a detailed, in-depth understanding of the subject under investigation” (Gönç Şavran, 2012: 72). The population of this study, designed using a qualitative research framework, consists of persons with disabilities living in the city centre of Van. The research sample consists of individuals aged 30 and over with orthopaedic, hearing and visual impairments who experienced the 23 October 2011 Van earthquakes and reside in the central districts of Van. For the fieldwork conducted in 2023–2024, participants aged 30 and over with orthopaedic, hearing and visual impairments were reached using the snowball sampling technique.

The fieldwork phase of the study was completed through interviews with a total of 9 men and 4 women with disabilities. The data used in this article are drawn from the author’s 2024 Master’s thesis, titled “Disaster Experiences of Disabled Individuals: Van Case”, published by the Department of Sociology at the Institute of Social Sciences, Van Yüzüncü Yıl University.

Findings

When asked whether they had experienced discrimination during the earthquake, it became clear that the participants in this study held differing views on the matter.

However, it was generally observed that they believed they had faced discrimination because of their disability, felt helpless, experienced discrimination due to their ethnic background, and were unable to receive support like other people with disabilities individuals, regardless of any specific circumstances.

The findings are presented under the relevant subheadings:

1. Discrimination due to Disability

As in all other contexts, participants in this study reported experiencing discrimination during the disaster process because of their disability. One such participant is Mustafa (43, with visual impairment). Mustafa described the negative reactions he encountered as follows:

We face discrimination. Sometimes it's really bad. It's happening right now too; for example, some people say, 'So why are you doing this? Why are you coming here like this? Stay at home.' If I had the financial means, I wouldn't be working as a street vendor here. I mean, if I had a job in an office, a salary and insurance, I wouldn't come here. The work I'm doing at the moment meets my needs from time to time. Not always, just sometimes. One day there's work, the next there isn't. No, the house is ours. It's ours now. I lived in rented accommodation for seven years; after the earthquake, I paid my rent with my disabled allowance. I was working as a street vendor (Mustafa, 43, visually impaired).

Erkan (57, with visual impairment) also experienced a situation similar to the discrimination Mustafa mentioned above during the disaster response. However, Erkan believes this problem stemmed primarily from a lack of communication with the authorities:

...well, there was discrimination because we couldn't get in touch with the authorities properly. In other words, neither they had enough information about me nor I had enough information about them. That's why discrimination occurred. Sufficiently... For instance, as I mentioned earlier, today there is documentation regarding my disability in social services, foundations, or other sectors—such as with neighbourhood or village wardens. They could have asked about these and reached out to me. They could have reached out to a disabled person because doesn't the neighbourhood warden know how many disabled people there are in my neighbourhood? Doesn't the head of my village know how many people with disabilities there are? They ought to know. They were in direct contact with the state, so they could have facilitated access. Of course, when we managed to reach them, it amounted to positive discrimination. In other words, as long as we could reach the impaired person, no one knew about anyone else; if we

managed to reach them fully, then naturally, things worked out. For example, as I mentioned earlier, Van Yüzüncü Yıl University had set up a crisis centre of its own. Food, blankets, water. A patient or impaired person in need could go there and apply to receive them (Erkan, 57, Visually impaired).

Zeynep (30, with an orthopaedic impairment) believes that the attitude towards people with special needs like herself is negative, regardless of the earthquake. Indeed, she has shared that it is important to her to describe her situation not as a disability but as a special need, as follows:

'Unfortunately, people with special needs are viewed very negatively, whether there's an earthquake or not.' We're seen as people who can't do anything. There's no such thing as 'before the earthquake' or 'after the earthquake' for us. They say we've started life at a disadvantage. I don't like that phrase much, but in our society—whether you call it the East or Türkiye, generally speaking—we're not treated very well. There's this mindset that we can't do anything. There's this thought of 'what could they possibly do?' Even if we do something, nothing spectacular is expected of us. They say, 'It won't have turned out very well anyway,' or 'they're disabled anyway.' They don't even say 'disabled'; they just say 'crippled' or 'blind'. Even the terms we use can make us lose heart about life. Yes, the concept of 'special needs' has only recently begun to enter our lives. I try not to use the word 'disability' much myself, but the word 'disabled' sounds better to my ears than 'cripple'. At least it doesn't bother me anymore, and it feels much closer to me than simply saying 'blind'. I know that's not entirely accurate either, but when I look at it, even in official documents today, whilst I'd expect to see 'special needs' written, I still see 'disabled' there. That strikes me as very wrong because, in reality, you—as a state and society—must accept it first. You must accept it so that the people accept it, so that society accepts it. I view it through that lens (Zeynep, 30, orthopaedically-impaired person).

Selim (33), who is a hearing-impaired person, added that they face discrimination from others because of their disability; he also noted that they encounter difficulties because, as hearing-impaired people, they are not easily recognised by others. Selim explains this situation by comparing it to other types of disability as follows:

We didn't even know what anyone was doing during the earthquake. You see, even after the earthquake, we really do face this because, as we can't hear, we're constantly in the background. I think being in the background is a form of discrimination in itself. Ultimately, yes, every disability has its own challenges, but because ours involves communication, we really did struggle. Even if they didn't intend to discriminate, and even if we couldn't hear, someone would still step in immediately... Take a visually impaired person as an example; when they walk with their cane, it's obvious, or a person with a

physical disability using a wheelchair—they're immediately noticeable. But we face difficulties because people don't easily notice us. In institutions, well, some were well-meaning; there were those who were different, and those who weren't. But generally, when priority should have been given, they'd call us and ask us to book a hospital appointment via 182 – that's the simplest example. (Selim, 33, hearing-impaired person).

As a person with a hearing impairment, Selim was forced to call 112 (the emergency number) to book hospital appointments, which naturally meant he had to ask someone without a hearing impairment for help. The example he gave is significant in that it highlights how all other hearing-impaired people face similar difficulties. It is expected that such problems will be identified according to the type of disability and resolved so that they no longer pose a problem for these individuals.

Mehmet (32, orthopaedicallyimpaired), however, has not faced direct discrimination due to his disability. However, he argues that the fact that people with disabilities live in buildings under the same conditions as others should be regarded as discrimination, and that improving this situation is their right:

...For example, in my view, this is discrimination because whilst you can escape more easily and attend to your needs more easily, I take longer to do so. Therefore, failing to prioritise this constitutes discrimination against a person with a disability, in my opinion. It occurs to me that: even today, construction work is still taking place, and during these construction periods, let's say I'm in a room; if an earthquake strikes, by the time I manage to get out, the house will probably have collapsed on top of me ten times over. So, if, when a house is built, there is a space or environment where I can get out easily, that would be wonderful. For example, if architects could be instructed to make this a mandatory requirement, I think that would be better. In such a situation, it would be easier to get outside. I believe this would also be a fair approach, an equality-based approach. There is one difference between us: I am disabled, you are not. When there's an earthquake, you can escape; I cannot. I believe there should be a door, a room, a space of my own where I can reach the same level as you—that's how I see it (Mehmet, 32, orthopaedically impaired).

The participants—in particular Mustafa, Selim and Mehmet—long for a system that takes into account the needs arising from their disabilities, enabling them to be on a more equal ground with others. These participants are, in fact, offering insights into the direction the Disaster Risk Reduction System (ARAS) for people with disabilities should take.

2. Despair

Some participants in the study stated that, whilst they did not feel discriminated against during the disaster process because of their disabilities, they did feel utterly helpless. One of these is Barış (30, with an orthopaedic disability). Barış shared the negative emotions he and his friend experienced as follows:

I didn't experience any discrimination after the earthquake. To be honest, given the environment I live in, I haven't really come across it, and I haven't been subjected to discrimination. However, I felt very inadequate. There could have been a bit more support. To be honest, I felt the support was very inadequate. But if you were to ask whether I experienced discrimination, I never encountered it myself. But there were people in my environment who did. For example, I have a friend who said he went through a lot of hardship. He admitted that no one looked after him during the earthquake and that even his family no longer accepted him. Because he is disabled—he is bedridden—his family felt they had to look after themselves rather than him. The neighbours apparently said, 'Let the state take care of him. He can't look after himself, you can't look after him, and no one else can either. Let the state look after him.' He admitted to experiencing such discrimination. So this is a definitely a tragic situation, definitely a tragic situation (Barış, 30, orthopaedicallyimpaired).

Barış reported feeling "very inadequate" in the aftermath of the earthquake; he also noted that a friend of his, who is orthopaedically impaired and bedridden, had been subjected to serious discrimination. Adem (32, hearing-impaired) shared that they had experienced great hardship during this period; however, he explained that they had managed to overcome these difficulties thanks to their family and neighbours, as follows:

To be honest, all of us with hearing impairments face constant difficulties. There are plenty of obstacles in our everyday lives too. Finding our way around is a struggle. We've had our fair share of difficulties. Fortunately, through my brother, we were kept informed about most things. That way, we could go and get some help, even if it was just small things. Generally, my brother would find out about things, and he'd go and make contact so we could get what we needed. As I said, because we're hearing-impaired people, we couldn't really get much help in most places we went to. They wouldn't offer any assistance. To be honest, we couldn't express ourselves and the other person didn't understand us. We faced a lot of housing issues; because we couldn't get help, we even struggled to get food. Whilst some people managed to get it easily, we couldn't access it because we couldn't communicate. To be honest, our neighbours helped us a bit with this. We

managed to set up the tent ourselves using whatever materials we could find there (Adem, 32, hearing-impaired).

Eren (40, hearing-impaired) was in a similar situation to Adem; because his family, and particularly his older brother, were by his side during this process, he was able to cope without making an issue of not being prioritised for assistance due to poor hygiene, the cold weather and his disability:

As there were already four or five families of us during the first earthquake, my brother was actually quite strong, so we managed to get a tent. To be honest, I'd sent my family back to the village. At that point, I'd sent my wife to stay with her father. We were just sitting in the tent, chatting all the time. When the second earthquake hit, we couldn't take it any longer and left. I didn't see any priority given to us. As I said, because it was my brother; to be honest, since he brought everything for us, I didn't have any dealings with the state or any organisations. As I mentioned, we went to Zonguldak twice. When we applied there, we also informed them that we were hearing-impaired. They helped us both financially and emotionally in Zonguldak. At that moment, we couldn't even think about hygiene because we were just trying to survive; the weather was already very cold and the water wasn't warm, so honestly, I can't really say anything about hygiene. We'd get up in the morning and almost all of us had noses frozen solid—we'd turned into clowns—so we were really struggling (Eren, 40, hearing-impaired).

Adem and Eren did not experience the helplessness that comes with hearing impairment to the same extent, as their families acted as their eyes and ears; they managed to get through this difficult period through mutual support. Unfortunately, however, not all people with disabilities have been so blessed.

3. Discrimination on the Basis of Ethnic Origin

Ceylan (36) is a female participant with visual impairment interviewed for this study. Like many other families affected by the earthquake, they were forced to go to Gaziantep because they were facing housing difficulties following the disaster. However, in addition to her disability, the fact that they had come from Van led her to feel that she was being discriminated against:

As I said, we didn't stay in Van for long; we had to leave after the earthquake. But in Gaziantep, I experienced this discrimination. People would say things like, 'The earthquake victims have come and become a nuisance for us now. They've ruined us.' I think they made us feel this deeply. We really wanted to return here as soon as possible. Because they truly didn't accept us there. I was already disabled. At the time, I was preparing for an exam. I went out onto the street a couple of times and immediately they said things like: 'He

doesn't even know how to walk; they've come here and ruined our city.' After hearing that a couple of times, to be honest, I didn't go out much and just sat studying during the day. From that day on, I'd tell my mum, 'I really need to stand on my own feet as soon as possible.' Because today you're here, tomorrow you might not be. If something had happened to one of you in that earthquake, I'd have been like a fish out of water and I'd never have been able to carry on with my life. Because I'd always lived dependent on them, always lived with them—they were always by my side, physically speaking—but after the earthquake, at that very moment, I reached a serious crossroads. I had to chart my own course. I needed to be a bit more independent. In that sense, it actually turned out for the best (Ceylan, 36, visually impaired).

Compared to the negative reactions Ferhat (30, orthopaedicallyimpaired) has faced, Ceylan's account seems far less severe. Ferhat described how his family stood by him in the face of his neighbours' discriminatory attitudes towards him because of his ethnic background, and how he managed to get through this difficult period, as follows:

Yes, the landlords always told us to 'go back to the East'. We were really marginalised there at the time. In fact, I had an argument with one of their neighbours there once. They came over to my brother's house for tea, and they were asking me what it was like there. They were talking as if it were some sort of animal den. I said there were 50 wolves and 50 dogs, attacking people. They were using phrases like that. I said, 'What are you saying? What are you talking about?' I even used this phrase: I said, 'There is only one God who neither falls nor rises; how can you use that phrase?' The people there were saying, 'May everyone in the East die.' At that moment, in front of my brother and sister-in-law, I told their neighbours, 'Get out of here.' I chased them away. You have no right to speak; you really don't. Up until now, my brother hasn't said that sentence to me; he said, 'You're right.' No one can say that to you. It's obvious what my brother's disability is like. My brothers were on the second floor. My sister-in-law and my brother were carrying me. I couldn't manage a single step; I was crawling, falling—what a struggle it was. Of course, my family did their best; may God be pleased with them. They were doing their best, but then a nephew was born during the earthquake. My sister-in-law was there. We were both orphans and fatherless; it was very hard. Have we made things easier now? Yes, we have. As you grow up, you become aware of many things. If it weren't for my family, I'd have killed myself. I'd have just rotted away in that filth. What can I do, mate? I'm disabled. I can't get up and climb onto the worktop. I can't even drink a glass of water. I can't get up and crack a couple of eggs. I didn't have that much experience anyway. I mean, I wasn't aware of anything (Ferhat, 30, orthopaedicallyimpaired).

Ferhat (30, orthopaedicallyimpaired) emphasised the desperate situation he felt himself in, saying, "If it hadn't been for my family, I would have killed myself." His physicalimpairment makes him dependent on his family; he cannot imagine continuing his life in a world where they are not there and where he faces discrimination.

4. Gender Discrimination

Tuğçe (54, female, orthopaedicallyimpaired), one of the participants in the study, shared that she received no assistance after the earthquake and that household chores were still being done by women, noting that no support came and that her daughter had to step in to help her and with the housework:

Honestly, women are victims at the hands of men [laughing]. They don't give us any peace. We were in tents, cooking meals during the earthquake. It was very hard; we received no help at all. I received no help at all. We were the ones cooking the meals. I didn't cook much myself. My daughter cooked the meals. She was washing our clothes and preparing our meals. It's only in the last two years that I've been able to work again. We had no means, no livelihood. I've been going to physiotherapy for 25 years. I'm ill. My husband and daughters brought me what I needed. No one helped us. My husband suffered a great deal. There was no money, no work. We suffered in the same way in Izmir. No help was given to us. Once they brought some second-hand clothes; they weren't fit to wear. There was nothing. No one helped us. During the earthquake, I couldn't continue my physiotherapy. I couldn't come for physiotherapy at all. I just stayed at home; I didn't go anywhere. I had no means. I went to the state hospital. They only treated me for one month (Tuğçe, 54, Female, orthopaedicallyimpaired).

As Tuğçe is a person with a disability, it is conceivable that she felt she faced gender-based discrimination due to her identity as a woman and a mother, and that this led her to adopt a protective stance. However, when Tuğçe, as the adult woman in the household, became impaired, all the tasks expected of a woman in the home fell to her daughter for a long period. During the earthquake, these tasks were again carried out by her daughter as a heavy burden. Tuğçe added that during this period, she faced serious difficulties and obstacles regarding work, food, money, clothing and medical treatment.

Up to this point, it is understood that individuals with disabilities believe they are subjected to discrimination in various ways during the disaster process. However, in the final subheading, it is evident that individuals with disabilities state they face discrimination in the delivery of aid that goes beyond their disability status.

5. Equality in Discrimination

As is well known and often emphasised, people with disabilities do not live on an equal footing with other members of society in many respects. However, disasters cause them

to experience and feel their disability much more acutely. Some of the people with disabilities included in the study, differing from this view, stated that they were subjected to general discrimination in the distribution of aid.

Emir (32) is a visually impaired participant. He wanted to highlight that, during the post-earthquake period, there was general discrimination in the distribution of aid to their neighbourhoods, not just against people with disabilities:

So it wasn't just about disability; there was general discrimination going on anyway. For example, aid would arrive. Sometimes it even came from officials. There was quite a bit of discrimination going on; you know, those who could take it to their own neighbourhood did so, or it was handed over to the local council offices. The council would either distribute it first to their own circle and not to others at all, or they'd only distribute the leftovers at the very end. So, in this regard, being disabled isn't the issue; there was already quite a bit of discrimination (Emir, 32, Visually-impaired).

Ayşe (33, orthopaedicallyimpaired) also shared, like Emir, that the aid received was either held back by certain people in the neighbourhood or looted, as follows:

I think we were subjected to discrimination after the earthquake. We weren't provided with any help whatsoever. We didn't receive any support at all. They didn't do a single thing—they didn't even come to check on us. They treated us as if we were from a slum. Then, when I went to make an application, they said, "No, the aid has arrived." If aid did come, where is it? Where did that aid go? Let me add one more thing... In our neighbourhood, our immediate neighbour was the imam. The third and second floors of his house were empty. He moved all the aid that came there, and those items are still in the same place. I can come and show you. My disability has nothing to do with this discrimination; it's not even relevant. No support came to my family, nor did any come to me. No aid reached anyone in the neighbourhood. I'm just in the neighbourhood, but that side of the neighbourhood wasn't supported at all. Whomever we asked on that side, there was no support. Right, they were giving it to the imams. The imams were taking it all anyway. There were neighbourhoods where the aid arrived immediately. By the time it reached our neighbourhood, it had all been looted by looters and was running out (Ayşe, 33, Female, orthopaedicallyimpaired).

The fact that they were viewed through the lens of ethnic origin, gender or impairment, or that they had visual, hearing or physical impairments, did not prevent the participants from seeing and understanding that the aid intended for earthquake victims was not distributed equally. Generally speaking, the inequality in the distribution of aid went beyond their disabilities, sometimes even making them forget that they were impaired.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the views of people with disabilities regarding their experiences during the disaster response process as forms of discrimination specific to their particular circumstances. In line with this objective, the findings of the study were analysed and categorised under the headings of discrimination on the grounds of disability, helplessness, discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin, gender discrimination, and equality in the context of discrimination.

As a general conclusion, it is evident that people with disabilities perceive their experiences during and after the disaster as discrimination. However, this is not a single form of discrimination. The participants in the study, who have different disability conditions, gender and age characteristics, suggest a structure in which they can reach a more equal level with others, provided that the needs arising from their disability conditions are taken into account. It is considered that these participants have made predictions regarding the approach the Disaster Risk Reduction System (ARAS) should follow for people with impairments.

The findings indicate that the earthquake disaster in Türkiye, and specifically in the Van region, has brought to light significant inequalities within society. The fact that participants emphasised that earthquake relief aid sent to their neighbourhoods was not distributed fairly and equitably suggests that there is a general pattern of discrimination beyond the treatment of people with disabilities during disasters. In addition to general discrimination, the attitudes of the families of person with disabilities and the communities in which they live, and whether or not they show solidarity with them, may have influenced whether person with disabilities characterised the disaster process they were experiencing as discriminatory or not. The findings of this study suggest that individuals belonging to ‘vulnerable/fragile groups’—including the poor, women, ethnic minorities, those with physical or mental disabilities, the elderly and children—may be more susceptible to the harms resulting from disasters, and are more prone to loss of life, suffering and injury (Wisner et al., 2004; Peek 2008; cited in Sırma, 2023: 386).

Furthermore, the study highlights the challenges faced by individuals with intellectual disabilities and their parents following the 2011 Van earthquakes, as examined in the work of Bilik and Akdağ (2023: 254), which focuses on the difficulties encountered by these groups; how they cope with these situations, and what their expectations are. In particular, the participant who shared, “No support came to my family, no support came to me, and no help came to anyone in the neighbourhood,” highlighted the unequal conditions faced by people with disabilities and all other earthquake victims; however, participants did not explicitly emphasise that people with disabilities should be prioritised among all earthquake victims in need. This situation has demonstrated a significant lack of a Disaster Risk Reduction System in Türkiye following the Van earthquake.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study demonstrates that the earthquake disaster experienced in Türkiye, and specifically in the Van region, has brought to light significant inequalities within society. People with disabilities believe they are subjected to discrimination from various angles and have put forward recommendations to mitigate these issues. The study concluded that the issue of accessibility to aid is a major barrier; that a lack of communication and information hinders the flow of information and reaching people with disabilities; that the inadequacy of healthcare facilities, treatment and access to medication worsens their health; and that the psychological effects of disasters on people with disabilities in particular, and the perception that they are being discriminated against, can be of vital importance.

The Disaster Risk Reduction System aims to prevent new disaster risks, mitigate existing risks and contribute to strengthening resilience. By utilising technology, developing new institutional and everyday communication channels that take into account the nature of disabilities, providing specialised accommodation and safe spaces, monitoring that support provided during the disaster process reaches the intended recipients, and creating educational programmes for the general public – given that anyone can become impaired at any time and that we all live alongside people with disabilities – will also ensure that ARAS acts in line with the principles of “understanding disaster risk, strengthening disaster risk governance, promoting investment in resilience and increasing preparedness: ‘Building Back Better’”.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval and written permission were obtained from the Van Yüzüncü Yıl University Social and Humanities Sciences Ethics Committee (approval granted at the meeting dated 07 September 2023, meeting no. 23, application no. 2023-23-07).

Author Contributions

Serhat Kaçar: Conceptualisation, Theoretical Background, Methodology, Data Analysis, Data Visualisation, Writing, Review and Editing, Funding Acquisition.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Plagiarism Checks

Ithenticate

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Araştırma Problemi: Afet yönetimi süreçlerinin engelli bireylerin gereksinimlerini yeterince gözetmemesi, afet öncesi, sırası ve sonrasında fiziksel, sosyal ve kurumsal engellerin kesişiminde yer alan bu bireylerin sistemik eşitsizliklerini ve kırılganlıklarını derinleştirmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı; engellilik, etnik köken ve toplumsal cinsiyet gibi kesişen kimliklerin afet deneyimlerini nasıl şekillendirdiğini ve bireylerin maruz kaldığı çok boyutlu ayrımcılık ile çaresizlik süreçlerini analiz etmektir. Araştırma, afet yönetimi süreçlerinde hak temelli, adil ve kapsayıcı politikaların geliştirilmesine yönelik kavramsal bir zemin sunmayı hedeflemektedir.

Araştırma Soruları:

- Engelli bireylerin deprem hazırlık, tahliye, barınma ve temel hizmetlere erişim süreçlerinde karşılaştıkları engeller ve ayrımcılık deneyimleri nelerdir?
- Afet süreçlerinde yaşanan güçlükler ve bilgi/destek mekanizmalarındaki yetersizlikler engelli bireylerde nasıl bir duygusal ve sosyal etki (çaresizlik vb.) yaratmaktadır?
- Etnik köken, toplumsal cinsiyet ve yoksulluk gibi kesişen kimlikler engelli bireylerin afet deneyimlerini ve kırılganlıklarını nasıl farklılaştırmaktadır?
- Engelli bireylerin ihtiyaçlarını merkeze alan eşitlikçi ve kapsayıcı bir afet yönetimi sistemi nasıl yapılandırılmalıdır?

Literatür Taraması: Literatür taramasının amacı, engelli bireylerin afet deneyimleri ve karşılaştıkları ayrımcılık uygulamalarına ilişkin kuramsal ve ampirik bilgi birikimini kesişimsellik perspektifiyle değerlendirmektir. Bu doğrultuda ulusal ve uluslararası veri tabanlarında yer alan hakemli makaleler ve kurumsal afet raporları taranmıştır. Alanyazındaki genel eğilim, afetlerin kırılgan gruplar üzerindeki etkilerinin orantısız olduğu ve engelli bireylerin afet yönetimi süreçlerinde sıklıkla göz ardı edildiği noktasında ortaklaşmaktadır. Bununla birlikte literatürde kapsayıcı afet yönetimi modellerini savunan kuramsal yaklaşımlar ile sahadaki uygulama eksiklikleri arasındaki belirgin uyumsuzluk ve kesişen kimliklerin (etnik köken, toplumsal cinsiyet) afet süreçlerine etkisini birlikte ele alan çalışmaların sınırlılığı temel bir farklılaşma ve boşluk alanı olarak öne çıkmaktadır.

Metodoloji: Araştırmada nitel araştırma yaklaşımı ve betimsel desen benimsenmiştir. Örneklem, amaçlı ve kartopu örnekleme yöntemleri kullanılarak belirlenen, daha önce afet deneyimi yaşamış 30 yaş üzerindeki ortopedik, görme ve işitme engelli bireylerden oluşmaktadır (örneklem büyüklüğü veri doygunluğuna ulaşıldığında sınırlandırılmıştır). Veriler, yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine mülakatlar aracılığıyla toplanmış ve katılımcıların deneyimleri ayrıntılı olarak kayıt altına alınmıştır. Elde edilen nitel verilerin çözümlenmesinde içerik ve tematik analiz teknikleri kullanılmıştır.

Sonuçlar ve Bulgular: Araştırma bulguları; tahliye, geçici barınma, bilgiye ve yardıma erişim süreçlerinde yaşanan erişilebilirlik yetersizliklerinin engelli bireylerde derin bir çaresizlik ve sistematik ayrımcılık hissi yarattığını göstermektedir. Etnik kökene dayalı ayrımcılığın sosyal dışlanmayı ve bilgi kısıtını artırdığı, engelli kadınların ise toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri, bakım yükü ve güvenlik riskleri nedeniyle çoklu ayrımcılığa maruz kaldığı saptanmıştır. Bu doğrultuda; engelli bireylerin afet karar alma mekanizmalarına dahil edilmesi, erişilebilir altyapı ve kriz iletişim ağlarının kurulması ile afet yönetiminin hak temelli ve kesişimsel eşitlik ilkeleriyle yeniden yapılandırılması önerilmektedir.