

FREQUENCY OF POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER AND ASSOCIATED FACTORS AMONG SURVIVORS OF VAN AVALANCHE: 6-MONTH FOLLOW-UP STUDY

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BACKGROUND AND AIM: Avalanche disasters are life-threatening events that may cause severe and long-lasting psychological consequences. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is one of the most frequently observed psychiatric outcomes following disasters. Although avalanches occur relatively often in Turkey, particularly in the eastern regions, there is a lack of research examining their psychiatric effects. Rescue workers, especially volunteers, are exposed to intense trauma during disaster response and may be at increased risk for PTSD.

METHODS: (Ethics Committee Approval must be obtained and the number should be specified). This study included 35 male rescue workers who were trapped under two consecutive avalanches that occurred in Van's Bahçesaray district in 2020. Participants were assessed through face-to-face clinical interviews at two and six months after the disaster. PTSD diagnosis was made according to DSM-5 criteria using clinical evaluations and the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Symptom Scale–Self Report (PSS-SR). Trauma severity was measured using the Impact of Event Scale (IES).

Sociodemographic and disaster-related risk factors were also recorded. (Ethics Committee Approval no: 2020/03-27)

RESULTS: PTSD prevalence was 71.4% at two months and decreased to 57.1% at six months after the avalanche. Longer duration under the avalanche (more than 30 minutes), being a volunteer rescuer, and having no prior disaster exposure were identified as significant risk factors for PTSD. Although symptom severity decreased over time, PTSD symptoms remained common, particularly among volunteer rescuers.

CONCLUSIONS: Avalanche disasters are associated with a high and persistent risk of PTSD among rescue workers. Professional training, psychological preparedness, and prior disaster experience may have protective effects. These findings highlight the need for early psychosocial interventions, regular mental health screening, and sustained psychological support for individuals involved in disaster response.

Keywords: Avalanche, psychiatric disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder