Crisis and resilience in psychology

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Abstract

Crises that occur after natural disasters are real and serious issues that can cause serious depression. A crisis is a situation in which a smooth process suddenly turns into a depression with negative, dangerous consequences. Since our country is in an earthquake-prone region and has experienced earthquakes with great losses, it has a very traumatic history. The concept of crisis, which spreads over a wide area, is a phenomenon that needs to be talked about by drawing boundaries. Natural disasters cause crises, and crises cause trauma. Resilience is the most effective way to deal with natural disasters and the traumas that follow. Resilience can be considered as the ability to adapt to the adverse conditions caused by external factors causing the crisis for disaster management. Psychological resilience is defined as the ability to cope with the negative consequences that may follow a natural disaster and adaptation to a negative situation. The phenomenon of resilience is important for both the individual and the society in societies where major natural disasters such as earthquakes are experienced. This definition of psychological resilience points to an approach that leaves the individual on his/her own in the face of disaster, crisis, and trauma by placing a great responsibility on the individual. However, individuals who have been exposed to natural disasters should not be left on their own and all opportunities should be mobilised to help them. Passive exposure to the wounds caused by natural disasters decays both the individual and the society. Instead, engaging in emotional, mental, social, and artistic investments and taking part in new and multiple fields will benefit the individual and the society in order to tackle the wounds.

1. Introduction

A crisis is a situation in which a smooth process suddenly turns into a depression with negative, dangerous consequences. Crises can occur in the economy, climate, politics, social processes and individual physical and mental health. The concept of crisis, which spreads over a wide area, is a phenomenon that needs to be talked about by drawing boundaries. For example, crises that occur after natural disasters are real and serious issues that can cause serious depression. Since our country is in an earthquake-prone region and has experienced earthquakes with great losses, it has a very traumatic history. Although earthquake experiences of Turkey are considered to be a thing of the past, they still carry unresolved burdens. The fact that earthquakes will not cease to occur makes it obligatory to make rapid and urgent plans and take precautions for the crises that will occur. Crises can occur in many different areas, or they can occur in a single area and affect all areas. The crisis caused by a natural disaster covers a wide range of phenomena from resilient buildings to resilient mentalities. The wide spread of resilience multiplies and diversifies the work to be done and the measures to be taken. Resilience can be considered as the ability to adapt to the adverse conditions caused by external factors causing the crisis for disaster management (Kundak, 2017). For psychology, disaster and post-disaster crises can be evaluated from different

perspectives. In general, what is expected from psychology is the trauma and the resilience developed against trauma, even before the disaster occurs. However, as well as individual exposure to trauma and resilience, exposure to trauma and resilience on a social level should also be taken into consideration. Trauma and resilience are two opposing concepts that have no meaning without each other. Traumas are situations that disrupt the physical and psychological integrity and balance to which an individual or individuals are exposed. The exposed event inflicts wounds that are either easy or difficult to cope with. The healing of the wounds varies according to the resilience or recovery skills constituted by the individuals and the environment. In social psychology, resilience or recovery skill is defined as the ability of people to heal their wounds to rebuild the old structure after a traumatic event. In other areas of psychology, resilience is defined as an individual trait and is also seen as a developable trait. The scientific validity of this understanding is open to debate.

2. Resilience, Disasters and Psychology

In the field of psychology, resilience has been emphasised in studies on individuals and children at risk of developing psychopathology after the World War II. After the studies, there has been a tendency to consider resilience as an individual characteristic, a process or a result. Resilience has often been examined in cases where psychopathology is not observed or within the context of evaluating various personality traits (İkizer, Karancı, & Doğulu, 2016). Psychological resilience is defined as the ability to cope with psychological difficulties, to tolerate restrictions on life, not to lose the will to live in the face of negative life events such as trauma, death and loss, not to lose mental balance despite all negative conditions, and not to lose the ability to adapt regardless of the conditions (Karaırmak, 2007). Psychological resilience is a complex concept in which individuals are thought to effectively develop a positive adaptation process in the face of great challenges. According to this definition, resilience is the ability to maintain mental health or to remain healthy in the face of difficulties despite adverse conditions. Like character and personality, resilience is sometimes thought to be an innate character trait. It is also considered as a predisposition developed as a part of the process of specialisation in certain abilities through experiences in the context of environmental change as well as biological, psychological and social aspects of the individual experiences (Okuyama, Funakoshi, Tomita, Yamaguchi, & Matsuoka, 2018). It is also referred to as the ability to recover from trauma, deprivation, threat or stress (Atkinson, Martin, & Rankin, 2009). The evaluation of resilience due to disasters and the crisis and trauma during the post-disaster stage has attracted attention (Wang, Shi, Zhang, & Zhang, 2010). Disasters are a potential problem of international importance. Disasters interrupt the daily lives of individuals and societies. Psychological resilience is defined as the ability to cope with the negative consequences that may follow a natural disaster and adaptation to a negative situation. Resilience is the ability to successfully adapt to exposure to a significant threat, severe distress, and stressor. Other mediating factors include disaster readiness, indirect trauma, understanding issues such as compassion, fatigue, burnout, and having an idea of one's own responses to stressors (Trip, Kosta, Maskill, Richardson, Dolan, Josland, McKay, Richardson, Cowan, Hickmott, & Houston, 2018). The phenomenon of resilience is important for both the individual and the society in societies where major natural disasters such as earthquakes are experienced. This definition of psychological resilience points to an approach that leaves the individual on his/her own in the face of disaster, crisis, and trauma by placing a great responsibility on the individual. However, individuals who have been exposed to natural disasters should not be left on their own and all opportunities should be mobilised to help them. Passive exposure to the wounds caused by natural disasters decays both the individual and the society. Instead, engaging in emotional, mental, social, and artistic investments and taking part in new and multiple fields will benefit the individual and the society in order to tackle the wounds (Bilgin, 2016). Psychology is generally expected to heal these wounds with the magic wand that it is almost assumed to have. Science has not yet found such a way. It is appropriate to consider what psychology can do within its limits to make resilience viable, especially in the post-crisis phase.

It can be expected that the effects of disasters can be immediately understood and eliminated by psychology. In daily life, psychology is defined as a science that produces formulae that enable people to control their emotions. Psychologists are defined as people who know how to regulate people's emotional states and solve problems with endless goodwill and understanding. Of course, this definition between a mother and a nurse is not correct, but this is generally the expectation. The first feature that requires us to move away from this definition is to recognise that human beings are not only made up of emotions and that the science of psychology is not only responsible for the healing of emotions. Concepts such as deprivation, mourning or grief, which have important cultural equivalents, are concepts that need to be dealt with in all dimensions of psychology. Psychology consists of many dimensions including psychological, cognitive, developmental, and social aspects. The relationship that individuals establish with themselves and the world, the way they produce these relationships, what other people have created before them, and everything that creates the present time of human beings is the subject of psychology. The human spirituality is located in a different sphere from what is going on in the surroundings. The space of the individual's relationship with self is spirituality. Losses have a crucial impact on the human psyche because losses require rebuilding of the order. Scientific psychological studies conducted to date indicate that losses should be evaluated distinctively from other life factors, both cognitively and psychologically. Crisis leads to trauma; trauma leads to loss, anxiety, fear, and mourning processes. Anxiety and fear are commonly felt emotions that belong to human beings. Managing anxiety and fear are the cornerstones of the human psyche. Grief after loss is a process that needs to be addressed, analysed, and regulated. Loss and the grief after loss begin as a self-overcoming process which the individual must manage on his/her own. But it does not always end and cannot be dealt with.

In the aftermath of disasters, it may take a long time for the crisis to be resolved, the effects of the trauma to be reduced, the mental balance to be restored, the outside world to become in accordance with the rules, and the usual environment and social environment to become ordinary and legitimate. Undoubtedly, the cognitive structures and environmental conditions that support the formation of social behaviour are indispensable elements for spirituality. However, repairing the losses of individual spirituality may require more effort. In short, daily life practices can be continued. But when you lay your head on the pillow at night, your conversation with yourself is important for waking up in the morning. That is if you have a pillow to rest your head on (Narter, 2020). It takes time to be able to grieve after a loss, to know that it is necessary to grieve and to accept mourning as a normal process. Each loss will be a reminder of previous losses. Disaster losses cannot be limited to loss of life. The houses, the neighbourhood, the grocery stores, the markets, the playgrounds, the schools, the bagel seller who is greeted every day, or the whole city may have been lost. Depending on the maturity of the self and the ability to soothe oneself, the spirituality will regress to the reminiscence of the first loss. With each subsequent loss, we start again from the point of the first spiritual loss. This first experience provides guidance in dealing with losses. In this sense, the losses also come from the outside as the other. But it is faced in spirituality. Only the spiritual construction itself knows the bond it will establish with the other. The bond with loss is established through mourning.

Cultural structures are the most important supporter of the individual during the mourning process. Continuing to live together is essential in culture. Death is the irreversible end for every individual. The loss of each relative serves as both an end and a remembrance of one's own death. Every culturally developed and religiously enriched death ritual is of great importance. Although it is believed that funeral gatherings and ceremonies after the death and the fulfilment of religious rules are important and necessary for the deceased. In fact, they are equally important and necessary for the ones left behind. Firstly, the person experiencing the loss needs to pay their debt of loyalty to the deceased and fulfil their duty completely. Then they must fulfil what their culture and beliefs expect of them. Because they need to be a good person. The individual encounters death and remembers that death is the ultimate reality. Therefore, individuals need to bless life and must continue to carry on living with their losses where death has left off. But this is a very

difficult experience. Culture is an important source of guidance. Every culture offers its members a form of mourning. The fact that this can be realised under customary conditions is an important gain in the spirituality of the person who has suffered loss. Human life cannot be completed without experiencing any loss. Every loss makes us question the meaning of life once again. It interrupts hanging on to life, enjoying life, producing, and creating new things. If the mourning experienced after the loss does not consume the individual's self-power, the individual finds the power to breathe again. Another situation that should be pointed out here is that losses are not only the loss of loved ones or their representation. The fields of psychology and often psychiatry have structured their theories on this psychological dimension and have made important explanations. But the endeavour here is about curing patients and diagnosing, identifying, and treating mental disorders. And so it should be. Loss, grief or mourning do not always declare their independence through a mental disorder. For example, indefinite grief can last a lifetime. Uncertain loss is one of them. These concepts, to which psychology and psychiatry seek answers today, have been on the agenda since the moment humans meet death. When non-psychological dimensions of psychology are involved, the process of mourning can be explained in other ways.

In Türkiye, funeral rituals are highly valued and carefully elaborated. Respect for the deceased and their relatives is an important cultural value. The desire to preserve the lost and not to forget them is very deep. Death is a situation in which this culture actually prefers to bless life. Deaths are manageable as long as this cultural sensitivity is kept alive. In the absence of funeral ceremonies, prayer events and condolence visits, the process becomes more challenging. The mourning process is, of course, unique to the individual. But every individual expects the country in which he/she lives to help him/her to calmly recover from this disaster that has befallen him/her through no fault of his/her own. The emotion that arises at the end of this process is hope. Hope indicates and even convinces that there is a life worth living. Almost the entire surface area of our country consists of fault lines. However, no progress has been made on measures to deal with earthquakes and the damage they may cause. Therefore, it cannot be said that governments and the state promise their citizens a life worth living.

3. Norms and Information that Change with Disasters

Disasters also rewrite the norms of daily life. Changes in norms require people to rebuild their social behaviour. Social behaviour is based on living together with others, establishing pleasant relationships, mutually constructing life and developing appropriate behaviours. When social rules are internalised on a personal level, they become regulators and promoters of social behaviour. It starts with the acceptance of the individual by the group to which he/she belongs and extends to the divinised hero or leader to whom he/she applies for the solution of any problem he/she trusts in his/her mind (Narter, 2022). If the individuals lose this basis, they also lose the guidelines for social behaviour. Social behaviour, which is often guided by the social environment, is private, complex, delicate, and symbolic (Moscovici, 1988). Social environments are a structure in which rituals, symbols, institutions, norms, and values are differentiated and defined through the processes of production and consumption. This structure is not universal. It is peculiar to the societies in which it exists or emerges. The origin and functioning of the social environment are also shaped by the individual, society and the time period experienced by society. At the same time, each society has a shared history, norms, rules, laws, and dynamics. The unique characteristics of social environments will lead societies to react differently to events or situations that occur in a given period. Of course, social environments cannot be evaluated independently of space. Spaces are effective in the formation of identity, in making the place unique to the individual and the individual unique to the place, in creating social control, and in finding one's roots. Losses of space after disasters cause irreversible damage to the identity, to the unique relationship of the individual with the space and to the relationship with the place where the individual finds his/her roots. The unique values and belief systems of societies are formed through and together with spatial relations. Cultural characteristics such as traditions, customs, beliefs and folk tales are often synonymous with the names of places. These names are important elements in conveying real and

reliable information to individuals. In order to understand the traditions, customs, customs and habits of an individual, the question "Where are you from?" is asked to get to know the individual. This question, which is asked in order to get to know the individual in front of you, is actually about where the individual in question sees himself/herself from, where he/she feels he/she belongs and the information he/she wants to give to the other individual about himself/herself. In this way, we can learn the place where the individual belongs, where he/she has made himself/herself unique and where he/she has taken root. The name of the place carries information explaining the characteristics of the individual. Therefore, for both individuals themselves and others, spatial information transmitted through common sense knowledge is an important transmitter. Common sense knowledge can be defined as a form of knowledge that is presented to the individual in a dominant and taken-for-granted form in accordance with the way of life of the society from the past. (Moscovici, 1984, 2008). Common sense is the body of knowledge produced by members of the same social or cultural group in a unique form and logic. Opinions, ideas, and thoughts produced in a certain way are shared and disseminated among the members of that society (Narter, 2012). Almost all situations encountered in daily life originate from common sense and are recognized in the individual's mind with common sense values. In other words, the thing for which a solution is sought comes from common sense and is analysed in common sense (Moscovici, 2001).

Knowledge is an abstract but valid concept that fulfils, satisfies and sometimes disappoints the interests, needs and desires of people from the environment in which they co-exist and interact. Knowledge is a set of concepts that are usually linked to specific, precise designs and produced under special conditions. (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999). The reality of our everyday lives is constructed through our interactions. This reality is shaped around common principles that are established and agreed upon in social environments. Social realities have an important place in common sense (Duveen, 2001). Social realities, which are part of common sense and almost govern daily life, can be a hindrance as well as a comfort to individuals. Today, we encounter too much unprocessed information that threatens our social reality and the information that constitutes it. This persistent information outside our knowledge completely envelops us. Evaluating and making sense of this persistent information overwhelms our minds. What is happening in the world and in our social environment is autonomous on the one hand and challenging on the other. While preserving the autonomy of the individual's cognitive world, what is going on in the world and the social environment of the individual have challenging aspects. Individuals try to establish an abstract cognitive process and concept chain without ignoring what is happening in the world and the pressure of their social environment while maintaining the autonomy of their cognitive world (Moscovici, 2001). This structure allows the individual to live his/her life without being anxious. But individuals may not always be so lucky. Sometimes individually and sometimes socially, situations or events where uncertainty prevails may occur. Disasters are important examples of these situations. Disasters and their aftermath will present an uncertain and ambiguous environment. Crises and traumas are the environments where uncertainty and ambiguity are experienced the most. Uncertainty and an uncanny environment create confusion. Human beings have never been friends with uncertain and uncanny situations. Individuals usually try to neutralise the elements of confusion as quickly as possible. Human beings want to know what will occur and what kind of a future awaits them. But in order to achieve this cognitive balance, the basic needs of human beings must be met. These basic needs are water, food, and a safe and sheltered living space. It cannot be said that human beings, who are biological beings, can be cognitively, emotionally, spiritually, and behaviourally healthy if their needs to feel safe for survival are not met. Psychological resilience is not an innate ability or an ability that can be created by psychological treatment. In disasters, individuals are exposed to trauma starting with the individual trauma caused by witnessing the event and extending to the loss of family members, neighbours, house, neighbourhood, and city. The opportunities provided to survive after these losses directly affect the resilience level of the individual. burying more bodies than he/she can remember after the disaster for an individual who has never seen a deceased body in his/her lifetime, is an example

of one of the traumas that shatter the physical and mental integrity of the individual. The effects of this severe trauma can of course be overcome with the help of specialists. However, the measures to be taken in the acute period following the traumatic incident must be measures that guarantee survival and promise a secure future. Only in this way can they be expected to develop a balanced psyche and be able to plan their future.

Disasters are situations that interrupt reasoning and problem-solving capabilities. Disasters and subsequent crises are major tests for individuals, communities, local authorities, governments, states and countries in building resilience, developing knowledge about the domain in which the crisis occurs, and establishing problem-solving skills. Kruglanski and Ajzen (1983) claim that knowledge is structured according to the stages of expression and solution of problems. According to this theory, Everyday Epistemology, the knowledge that individuals acquire in their daily lives to fulfil their cognitive needs is governed by their prior beliefs about which knowledge and the way of acquiring knowledge will be useful (Kruglanski, 1990). These beliefs, which are previously acquired in the pursuit of knowledge and solving problems, and which enable finding the truth, are the mobilisers of the cognitive drive to knowledge. Satisfying this impulse is an important stage. From time to time, people may also tend to cease to receive new knowledge. They may stop their search for information, decision-making and finding solutions. He/she may prefer to finalise an issue, to fix the account related to that issue. This concept is called cognitive closure or need for closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1997). Cognitive closure or the need for closure is the individual's attempt to simplify the information he/she has acquired about the problem he/she wants to solve in order to eliminate its complexity. Underlying this endeavour is the impulse to avoid uncertainty. The need for simplification to avoid uncertainty enables the individual to show two tendencies. The first one is to try to solve the problem by reaching a judgement quickly in order to provide closure or completion in haste. This is called seizing. The second is the tendency to maintain closure or completion or to ensure continuity by freezing. This freezing tendency continues to use old and acquired knowledge to eliminate new and contradictory information (Atak, 2016). Every uncertain, uncanny, confusing and confusing external incident will push individuals to search for solutions. Especially the losses experienced will further accelerate this situation. Losing a loved one, norms, order of life, freedoms and rights will drive individuals to search for a solution. Disasters challenge cognitive structures. Everything is turned upside down and the world is perceived as a different place than it used to be. The resulting difference will be tested by the adaptation skills of human beings. The social life changes completely after a disaster and such a change is a loss. This loss most probably accompanies the mourning process. Mourning is a compulsory process to maintain the balance of the psyche. Places, societies, countries, and states cannot mourn like individuals. The loss of the past initiates a sad process of change.

4. Conclusion

Change is always met with resistance. The crisis that develops during and after a disaster is a negative change process. Change and constancy are concepts that we experience while changing our habits, shaping our relationships, solving our problems, and questioning our choices in daily life, in other words, concepts that we understand through living experiences. We conceptualise change and constancy as the cornerstone of shared social knowledge while trying to survive and evaluate the events that occur before us (Markovà, 2003). Social knowledge can be defined as knowledge in communication and action. Knowledge that has not been shaped, found meaning, echoed, transformed and formed a common opinion among individuals, individuals and groups, subgroups and culture cannot be regarded as social knowledge. The concepts of change and constancy are asymmetrical. Within the context of social knowledge and social structures, change is perceived as dangerous until it turns into constancy. Everything that comes from the external world and proposes change causes the shaking of the constants that have been decided and fixed in the past. This will bring serious cognitive confusion for human beings. Until this uncertainty is absorbed and legitimised, or more precisely, until it is convinced that the enemy will no longer do any harm, society will cling tightly to the constants of the past. This restlessness and conflict will

continue to be experienced until change becomes a constant. Since we cannot talk about self-belonging to society, the mourning experienced in the spiritual sense will not offer a functional explanation here. Because the state of pain caused by the loss in the spiritual sense can only be experienced individually to avoid the loss of interest in the outside world. It is not possible for a society or a country to avoid all reminders of their loss. The reason for this is quite simple. When a person's heart stops beating, they die, but a society or a country does not even have a heart to die when it stops beating. The conditions are very different. It is often thought that change hides the new and perhaps the good, but this is often not the case. Change is challenging in every field. As in the dilemma of "should I remain a child or should I become an adult" that the individual experiences during adolescence. Or as in the questions of "Should I get lost in the destruction of the old or should I move forward in the energy of the new?". Of course, this dilemma of change does not last forever. When this process is completed, you will either become a mature adult or remain a child who looks like an adult. In other words, you either fade away from past losses or look forward and try to seize the opportunity to develop. This is not a situation that can be overcome by individual psychological resistance. Determining the direction and form of change is more related to the resilience of governments and states - in crises such as disasters - than to individuals. It is critically important which government will govern the society, the state and the country. The ability of the governments to manage the crises that may arise before, during and after a disaster is considered the ability to govern the country in many countries of the world. In the case of disasters, it is usually not clear by whom the crises will be solved. Therefore, as the area of crises expands, the traumatised area grows. In an earthquake country like Türkiye, securing life, property and future is among the most vital tasks. Securing life, property and future is necessary to increase the resilience of governments, states and countries against potential disasters. Security of life and property usually implies the security mechanisms that the state should provide for its citizens, such as the police and military forces. The security provided by the state is usually never questioned in the practice of daily life. It either exists or will establish control as soon as possible. However, when the enemy that threatens life safety is a disaster, it is not clear who will fight against it. Is it individuals, neighbours, volunteers, doctors, search and rescue teams, mine workers, members of parliament, celebrities, the rich of the country, scientists, economic power, or military prowess? None of them alone is sufficient for resilience against disasters. With a good organisation, all units must take part effectively. Otherwise, it is not possible to develop resilience against disasters. Crises and traumas caused by disasters will consume the members of the society, the community, the country and all its resources. Trauma renders its victims helpless with an overwhelming force; if this overwhelming force is caused by nature, it is a disaster, but if it is the product of a human being, it is an atrocity (Herman, 2016).

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Resume

Meltem Narter graduated from İstanbul University Faculty of Literature Department of Psychology in 1996. In 2002, she received the title of doctor with doctoral thesis on "Republican Identity of College Youth"; at Institute of Social Sciences of İstanbul University, Psychology Department. In 2002, she received the second prize in the research writing competition titled "Republic through the Eyes of Youth", organized by the Publications Department of the Ministry of Culture, with her research titled "Republican Identity Definitions of University Youth". She completed his work titled "Social Representations of Psychoanalysis in Turkey", supported by Istanbul University Scientific Research Projects Unit, in 2008, and his book of the same name, which she wrote based on this study and published in 2012, was deemed worthy of the 2012 Psychoanalysis Writings achievement award by the Istanbul Psychoanalysis Association. Narter is currently a faculty member of the Department of Psychology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Üsküdar University.