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EARTHQUAKE AFFECTED
REGION IN SUPPORT
MECHANISMS AND IN
THEIR ATTEMPTS TO
DISTANCE THEMSELVES
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Experiences of Women in the Earthquake Affected Region in Support Mechanisms And in Their Attempts to Distance Themselves From Violence

In the aftermath of earthquakes that occurred on 6 February 2023 affecting 10 provinces, Mor Çatı Women's Shelter Association [reported](#) on its observations after visiting the provinces of Malatya, Adıyaman, Kahramanmaraş, Gaziantep, Hatay and Adana between 20-24 February 2023 to monitor the mechanisms in place in these affected provinces to combat violence against women and observe the status of women and children who are experiencing or at risk of violence. We carried out our second visit to the quake-stricken region between 25-28 April 2023. During this visit, we inquired into the present situation and the existing support mechanisms in the provinces of Adıyaman, Kahramanmaraş, Gaziantep, Hatay and Adana. We held meetings with ŞÖNİM (Violence Prevention and Monitoring Center), bar associations and a municipality of a province that receives a high influx of migrants.

In the planning of our first visit, our aim was to figure out how to foster solidarity with women in the affected region and comprehend the status of support mechanisms against violence. In doing so, we had the opportunity to identify and report the problems in existing support mechanisms and gather information so that we can provide correct guidance to women who apply to Mor Çatı with respect to the violence they experience. The purpose of our second visit was to find out whether there has been any improvement in the support mechanisms to combat violence against women in the two months since our first visit. When women who are living in the affected region or are forced to relocate to another province apply to Mor Çatı for assistance with respect to the violence they experience, we observe that these women face challenges in accessing institutions and thereby their access to rights is blocked. Therefore, we wanted to pay an onsite visit to these institutions to understand existing challenges and discuss the problems faced by women in accessing support.

This report is based on our observations of this visit, drawing also from the information and experiences we obtain from women who apply to Mor Çatı for support as well as the experiences¹ of women in the affected region who join workshops held by Mor Çatı for social workers and psychologists.

1 Due to the devastating earthquakes in February, we had to postpone two planned workshops, namely the Workshop on Social Workers on Combatting Violence Against Women which was finally held on 1-2 April and the Workshop for Psychologists on Combatting Violence Against Women held on 6-7 May 2023 in Istanbul. The participants of these workshops included colleagues from public institutions, Ministries, municipalities, and civil society organisations working in the field of violence against women, women and LGBTI+ organisations as well as social workers and psychologists from private institutions. We included a specific forum in the previously drafted workshop agenda to discuss the challenges and experiences we have had in the aftermath of the earthquakes. Data used in this section are based on the information obtained in the forums held as part of these workshops.

Current Status of Public Institutions That Are Obligated to Provide Services to Women Experiencing Violence

We saw that the required measures set down in the report on our first visit of 20-24 February 2023 have not been adopted and the needs remain the same. The needs of women living in the affected region with respect to humanitarian assistance, health and security remain unchanged and harbour different forms of discrimination. We saw that the impacts of gender inequality on women placed a heavy burden on women, ranging from taking care of children to cleaning and providing for essential needs. Tent cities and newly built container cities are not designed in a way where women and children can feel safe. Most of these living spaces still lack basic needs including clean drinking water, latrines, showers, electricity, and laundry. Even when these basic needs are covered, they are either not constantly available or of an inadequate quantity to meet the needs. The staff finds that the lack of privacy in tent cities and the absence of a regular and systematic information-sharing and response present a heightened risk of cases of violence against women and child abuse in the affected region; nevertheless, there is yet to be a preventive effort in place to address such risks.

Official public buildings of ŞÖNİM in Gaziantep and Kahramanmaraş continue to serve in the same premises they occupied prior to the earthquakes. We found out that ŞÖNİM in Hatay, together with its official service units, has moved to a separate building in another region. ŞÖNİM building in Adıyaman is heavily damaged and provides services from a container placed right next to it. However, we noticed that this container operated under the risk to life safety and fell short of both ensuring the safety and meeting the basic needs of its workers and the women and children who sought support. We saw that women started to apply to ŞÖNİMs for assistance, except for the ŞÖNİM in Hatay; however, access to ŞÖNİMs was only possible for women who lived in the city center or who could use public transport or had their own means of transport. Women who live in villages or in remote areas where public transport is not currently available due to the damaged caused by the earthquakes, face an additional challenge to access institutions.

We frequently report that there is a general problem with ŞÖNİMs, that they fail to fulfil a fundamental activity, which is to monitor the status of women for whom protection measures have been taken and confidentiality decisions have been issued. There still does not exist a systematic monitoring work and qualified consultancy services which should be carried out by ŞÖNİMs for all women including those who, prior to the earthquakes, have been receiving support from relevant units because of the violence they experience and those for whom protection measures and confidentiality decisions have been taken. In our meeting with ŞÖNİM staff, they stated that they referred women who apply for women's shelter to provinces in close proximity. However, we found out from social workers and psychologists, who are working in the region and who joined our workshops, that in cases where this does not prove to be a realistic solution women continue to live in a violent environment. In addition, we learnt that fundamental duties were not fulfilled due to a lack of technical infrastructure, including monitoring the status of women who benefit from the Law no. 6284, that the flow of information was not ensured and ŞÖNİM staff only found out about emergency cases when they were conveyed to them by the Provincial Directorate of the Ministry of Family and Social Services. We saw that with

respect to implementing confidentiality decisions and restraining orders, the practice varied depending on the initiative of ŞÖNİM staff. We also became aware of a few good practices where perpetrators were removed, albeit rarely, upon complaints of women living in tent cities and women could continue to stay in the same tent.

In our meetings with all ŞÖNİMs, they pointed to a rise in the demands for accommodation in the aftermath of the earthquakes. An ongoing problem is that women need to apply to anti-violence mechanisms for accommodation as a consequence of the failure of the State to find a solution to the housing problem. This situation has inevitably exacerbated after the earthquakes. Furthermore, with regard to the applications made under the Law no 6284, we found out that law enforcement officers, in an attempt to avoid risk-taking, refer to the Law no. 6284 to address cases of violence that break out between any two persons particularly in areas less damaged by the earthquakes and inform ŞÖNİMs of these cases. This situation strips the law of its quality of an anti-violence mechanism and creates problems in implementation. On the other hand, the experiences of women who contact Mor Çatı reveal that when they seek support for violence, their appeal is regarded as a need for accommodation, and they do not receive any support at all. Considering this information together with women's experiences, we think that there are serious problems in the standard of services and the existing expertise in violence against women.

Formal tent cities controlled by the state have psycho-social support teams (PSS), consisting of the staff of Provincial Directorate of the Family and Social Services Ministry, Social Services Center, and international organizations. We were informed that when there was a complaint filed for violence against women in tent cities or when a case of violence against women was observed, women were referred to PSS teams. While these PSS teams carry out the tasks that are in fact the obligations of ŞÖNİMs, ŞÖNİMs mostly receive calls related to cases of violence via ALO 183 hotline and the law enforcement. However, we saw that there was not a regular coordination between ŞÖNİM and PSS teams in the same province that incorporated any follow-up work. In addition, we have also observed that ŞÖNİMs in separate provinces were not even aware of each other, let alone coordinate with each other.

The Bar Association of Kahramanmaraş, one of the places we planned to visit, could not be reached at all. We saw that every bar association could take initiatives depending on the local situation, its relations and its power and that the support provided was short of standardisation. We found out that permissions granted to officials of bar associations varied according to provinces and that bar associations could provide specific information on male violence in tent cities. We learnt that a bar association, showing initiative, kept its judicial assistance unit open regularly and provided legal support to issue injunction orders under the Law no. 6284 even in circumstances where Family Courts were not functional, whereas another bar association did not offer such support.

A bar association stated that they were working with the prosecutor to issue injunction orders at Criminal Courts of Peace and Magistrate Courts under the Law no. 6284, adding that, since the earthquakes, they have filed 33 criminal complaints so far in connection with violence against women. In addition, we learnt that the postponement of judicial procedures until 2 May has adversely affected women who experience violence or whose

alimony litigation is ongoing. We saw that the earthquake law and rights violations were heavily on the agenda of judicial assistance in the region. As a consequence, we observed that some lawyers were exhausted and hence might tend to prioritise their well-being sooner rather than later. This poses questions about the quality of the legal support given to women experiencing violence. In our meeting with a municipality of a relatively less affected province, we found out that municipal staff had next of kin in both the affected region and the region destructed by the earthquakes, that preparations were underway to address the high and imminent risk of a major earthquake in the province and that the province received a high influx of migration from provinces most damaged by the earthquakes. We saw that they lacked the capacity to meet these needs and giving support to women who experience violence was not prioritised among the needs.

Supporting the Personnel of Public Institutions That Are Obligated to Provide Services to Women Who Experience Violence

Mor Çatı, both in its field visit and in its workshops for social workers and psychologists attended by participants engaged in anti-violence against women in the region, has identified certain shortcomings in the support available to the staff of institutions that are obligated to provide support to women.

We learnt that since our first visit there has still not been a clear and comprehensible procedure put in place, one which is developed in accordance with the circumstances and meets the current needs of both all public personnel working in the region in the field of violence against women and the staff of partner institutions. We observed that the staff was still short of adequate information and equipment. Furthermore, they lacked supervision support. The Ministry of Family and Social Services has not yet adopted a plan to ensure the functioning of these institutions or provide for the well-being of staff who lost their family members or colleagues. Social workers and psychologists, whom we had the opportunity to hear in our workshops, stressed the broader implications of these shortcomings. Social workers and psychologists working in institutions that have an obligation to support women experiencing violence pointed to the lack of a standardised mechanism where they could give a referral to women and children subjected to violence, adding that they faced a chaotic situation in support systems. They shared with us the challenges they faced in carrying out social work or providing mental support because of unmet basic needs despite the amount of time that has passed since the earthquakes. We found out that the professional staff, although they have also been directly affected by the earthquakes, were expected to continue to work in the acute period without any regard to the impact the disaster has had on them. In addition, we learnt that, in the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes, professional staff at public institutions had to respond to various cases, including medical ones, about which they have had no previous experience or knowledge. Although quite some time has passed since the earthquakes, we observed that professional staff has not received any support although they have been emotionally quite affected by both their own experience of the earthquakes and the experiences of those to whom they provide support. They stated that public personnel who were directly affected by the earthquakes were called back to work immediately after the earthquakes on account of visits by high level government

officials. In addition to providing services to affected citizens, public personnel had to take on the burden of greeting such visitors while having to wear professional outfits and display appropriate conduct. They noted that such visits could sometimes create a circle of events that could end up retraumatizing affected persons.

In addition, we saw that, since our first visit, the number of volunteering assignments, which was quite high at that time, has significantly decreased and most of the staff are assigned on a short-term basis unwillingly and mandatorily from other provinces. Women who attended our workshops noted that there was not a unified practice in place which specified job descriptions of experts assigned to the quake-stricken region or which set down the procedures to follow in these assignments.

Ultimately, we noted the sharp decline in the number of staff in institutions that provide support to women experiencing violence. We further saw that posts remained vacant and although almost 3 months have passed since the earthquakes, the staff is yet to receive support with respect to the inadequacy of equipment required to address specific needs in the aftermath of the disaster. Moreover, the much-needed supervision support is not available to the staff although they work non-stop and overtime. Nonetheless, we saw that the women we met during our visit and those who attended our workshops fulfilled their tasks voluntarily and with great enthusiasm. These women stated that working in the field made them feel good and they were in a way trying to get post-trauma support by healing themselves with their own methods.

POST-EARTHQUAKE APPLICATIONS TO THE SOLIDARITY CENTER AND EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN

Immediately in the aftermath of the earthquakes, we saw some decline in the number of applications made to Mor Çatı Solidarity Center in connection with violence. We think that this is related to the impact of the earthquake on all women. In the aftermath of a disaster, the emotions and the thoughts that prevail may make it harder for women to realise the violence they experience, causing them to hold back on making sense of and expressing their experience of violence. Women may compare the challenges they face with those faced by persons affected by the earthquakes and tend to find what they are going through meaningless and feel guilty about seeking support for these challenges. Following this first period, around 10 days after the earthquakes, the frequency of applications made to the Solidarity Center with respect to violence has returned to the similar levels of the pre-earthquake period.

Women affected by the earthquakes contacted us with various demands. Most of the women who reached us experience violence, in one form or other, prior to and after the earthquakes; however, some women did not share an experience of violence but demanded in-kind/financial assistance to meet their or their children's basic needs or to start their lives over after the earthquakes and stay in a safe place. Women who were in an acute state because of the violence they experienced, asked for information about how to get to a safe place posthaste. Women who needed urgent support with regard to abduction of children asked for legal information. In addition, women, who did not face any threats to their security and who did not demand in-kind/cash assistance, asked for legal and social support on how to access their rights.

A considerable number of women who reached us stayed with their extended family in the affected region or in provinces they migrated to after the earthquakes. They described the feeling they had after the earthquakes as despair. We saw that women delayed talking about the violence they experienced unless there was a threat to their security. Women's priority has been to meet the most basic needs of themselves and their children, if they had any. Women who migrated to other provinces said that they thought of returning to their own province in due course. However, they did not know when or how they could return. They told us that they could not plan and could only focus on the moment. For instance, a woman with children said, "We are here till the school term is over, we will see what happens next". One woman, in describing her predicament, said "You may have seen in the news that, on top of the devastation caused by the earthquakes, Iskenderun is recently hit by floods. It is very difficult to make a plan".

Women with whom we have fostered solidarity and who do not live in the earthquake region have also shared their feelings about the earthquake. In the aftermath of the earthquakes, the projections of a possible earthquake in Istanbul in future have become high on the agenda of women living in Istanbul, who feel anxious and insecure in their homes. In addition, as mentioned above, women shared their feelings of guilt when they compared their challenges to what people have been going through in the affected region. Women shared their feelings with us by saying "I should not be sharing my challenges at this time/ this is not the time to share", "Compared to what persons affected by the earthquakes are going through, my own experience does not matter", "I do not need support, I should not be in the way of those who really need it". We saw that women felt that their needs arising from their experience of violence were negligible. This is undoubtedly a consequence of the impact on women of the male dominant system that trivialises violence inflicted on women. We fostered solidarity with the women and talked about the similarities between the feelings of fear, anxiety, and guilt after a disaster and after experiencing violence and the ways of coping with these feelings.

Violence continues post-earthquake

In the first few weeks after the earthquakes, we saw that some women, together with their families, found their own solutions for a place to stay, some returned to their homes in villages, and some went to other provinces to move in with acquaintances or strangers they describe as charitable persons. However, they stated that they continued to experience violence in these new places that they moved into usually with their extended families and demanded access to a women's shelter or a place to take shelter. Support mechanisms established after the earthquakes do not take cases of violence into account and the authorities act on the assumption that "no such thing would take place at a time like this", revealing that male violence against women prevails in the aftermath of the earthquakes.

A woman gave an account of her experience of violence, where her husband inflicted physical, psychological and sexual violence on her, attempting on her life by assaulting her with sharp objects, which goes to show that violence is an act of choice and hence continues in the aftermath of the earthquakes. "After all that we have been through, after surviving the earthquakes, how could he still commit violence? People give us their support and this is what he does. Even strangers are helping out, opening their homes to us. We are married for 6 years, and we cannot trust each other."

Another woman shared her experience when she called for support because of the violence inflicted on her by her husband, “We have survived an earthquake! Look at the state we are all in! Not only that he inflicts physical violence on me because he knows that I still cannot reach the police, but he also uses psychological violence by saying “If you had moved to another place without me, they would not have been able to find your dead body in 2 months. See?” Similar accounts given by women show us that post-earthquake circumstances are also used to manipulate or coerce women into questioning their decisions to live alone or get a divorce, causing them to remain in an environment of violence.

A woman who had moved to another province with her children told us that her husband called and threatened her relatives, causing the relatives to put pressure on her to go back. “I am a mess, I have sunk into total silence, I used to have a home. If I had had a home, I would not gone anywhere else”, she said.

Another woman told us that she had survived the earthquakes with her child. Her estranged husband was living in another city, and he did not experience the earthquakes. She drove to the city where her husband was living but he continued to insult and threaten her and took the car away. She explained that she and her child had to take shelter in the car in the first days after the earthquakes and they were left without a shelter when her husband took the car from her. She said that after she and her child were subjected to violence, she

“I am tired of everything, it is not just the earthquake”

went to the police seeking for access to a women’s shelter, but the police besmirched women’s shelters and did not take her and the child to a women’s shelter. After becoming homeless due to the earthquakes, her car has become vital for her, but she could get the car back from her husband only after an injunction, issued under the Law no. 6284 based on a court judgment and a decision of the prosecutor, indicated that “the vehicle should be given to the person”. Her husband was intimidated by the court decisions, and she could finally get her car back. She added that to get away from her abusive husband, she drove back to the province where she survived the earthquakes and moved in with a friend whom her husband did not know about. In other words, she had to find a way herself to tackle violence.

Some women who had to change their way of life and homes as a consequence of the earthquakes had to return to households where they experienced violence, while others had to go back to the region where the perpetrator of violence lived. A woman who had to move to another province and disappear without a trace because of the threats and violence she suffered from her husband had to return to the province and stay with her family after the earthquakes. “I had to hurry back to my mother’s home. He lives in the same neighbourhood. I cannot get out of the house. He may kill me if he sees me. After the earthquakes, I do not know what to think, let alone what to do. If he knew I was here, he would kick not only me and my children but also my family out of this house”, she said.

We saw that children continue to be used as a tool of violence even after the earthquakes. A woman, who was in her last stage of pregnancy when the earthquakes occurred, described her situation briefly: “I am tired of everything, it is not just the earthquake”.

She told us that she experienced violence in her marriage prior to the earthquakes, but her family always put pressure on her to stay with her husband despite the violence. Her husband was in prison at the time of the earthquakes, so she, in her pregnant state and with her minor child, went to stay with her family for support, but her brother threatened to do harm to her little kid. She was racked with pain a few times after the earthquakes but had no access to a hospital. AFAD suggested at first that she stay in a tent with her family but when she let them know of the violence inflicted by her family, she was placed in a common space in a mosque. Another woman asked about her rights in relation to the abduction of her child, telling us that after the earthquake disaster she was located to a dormitory together with her husband and child, but her husband abducted the child. She added that they had joint custody of the child but her husband did not let her see the child.

The women said that, both prior to and after the earthquakes, the cause of violence was attributed to psychological problems even though violence is an act of choice. A woman told us that in the aftermath of the earthquakes they moved in with her husband's relative whose less damaged house was in the same province, and they all started to live in the crowded house. She said her husband started to yell at her while she was preparing food for her children and came at her. She told him "I am a woman too, why are you yelling at me? I am in pain. Others understand each other's pain, do not make me go through this" but this infuriated him even more. Moreover, family members in the household told her that his rage was due to the earthquake, and it was the woman who had to take it all in her stride. A woman who experienced systematic violence inflicted by her husband and family members said of her situation, "Violence does not hold off for earthquakes".

"Violence does not hold off for earthquakes"

For some other women, the earthquakes provided an opportunity to get away from their abusers and disappear without a trace. A woman who has been experiencing violence in her marriage for a long time said that, at the time of the earthquake, she managed to get out of the house with her daughters and got away with only the clothes on her back. Her husband was aware that she left the house, but they managed not to run into him again. Prior to the earthquakes, she had been going through a very difficult divorce and had been forced to live in the same house with her husband and subjected to a systematic psychological violence despite the restraining order against him. After the earthquakes hit the province, she got support from her inner circle at the first opportunity and reached her family who lived in another affected province. However, her husband continued to threaten her with violence by trying to reach her family members, so she tried to find alternative solutions. She said, "We had to keep moving and change places out of fear, we came to the municipal space. They actually pointed us to another tent, but we chose to do this instead so that our trace cannot be found".

Living conditions in tent cities exacerbate the situation for women experiencing violence. A migrant woman who is living with her children in a tent while her husband stays at home due to a restraining order said that her husband has continued to inflict violence on her in the tent. Her husband assaulted her in the tent, which led to a new restraining

order indicating that the husband should not come near tent number “x”. However, the husband defied the restraining order against him and kept on making threats. The woman continued to remain in a tent city where she could not get any translation support, nor could she reach the police or be taken to a women’s shelter due to her migrant status and the number and age of her children. “I have so many children. The latrine is far away. I keep taking them to the latrine. He comes to the tent and tells the children that he is going to kill me. It is also not safe where the latrines are. He can kill me while I am there”, she said sharing her despair. This demonstrates how the circumstances in the earthquake affected region and the shortcomings in institutions lay the ground for the perennial violence against women. This situation sets a clear example of the multi-layered hindrances facing migrant women.

Despite the devastating emotional and physical impact of the earthquakes and against all odds, women continued to find their own strengths and come up with alternatives to distance themselves from violence.

Women’s needs

Women who continued to live in tents, containers or self-made informal settlements including shacks or women who migrated to other provinces after the disaster also demanded in-kind/financial support without giving an account of any violence against them. They stated that they could not access the support mechanisms in place in the affected region. For instance, a woman told us that she lived in a shack with her extended family and 11 months old infant, they could find a tent to live in as late as 2 months after the earthquakes, they have not been able to transfer to a tent city yet and they could not meet the basic needs of the infant and herself. She said that markets were set up to provide basic in-kind needs of persons affected by the earthquakes, but the roads were heavily damaged due to the earthquake, making it difficult to get to the market. Even if she managed to go to the market, she could not wait in line too long nor could she go front in the line with an infant in her arms to be able to receive the aid distributed from a single point, she needed support to have clothing and formula brought over to where she lived. She mentioned that clothing was a constant need as it was too difficult to maintain hygiene and cleanliness. It is apparent that the aid provided in the earthquake affected region is not planned in consideration of specific needs of women. Again, another woman told us that after the earthquakes, she started to live in a warehouse-like place together with her relatives and a few other families, she barely found time to give us a call because of all the care work she had to do for the whole family and added that she sought financial support. She also stated that her husband would not go himself to the relevant places to ask for support but expected her to do so and he knew that she called us. This demonstrates that in the patriarchal society we live in, it is seen as a woman’s duty to apply to and follow up with social support mechanisms as much in times of disaster as in “regular” times.

Another demand made by women was with regard to legal support, the need to consult about their legal rights. Some women who filed for divorce called us for support and others called to find out about the divorce process, asking how they could file for divorce and what their rights were with regard to compensation and alimony. Bar associations, where women who need legal support are supposed to apply for assistance and which have an obligation to provide free legal support to women experiencing violence, failed

to satisfy this need. A woman mentioned that she did not know where the bar association was, but this was a moot point since there was no public transportation anyway to get to the bar association, so she arrived at a solution by moving to another province and postponing the legal process. The postponement of court cases due to the declaration of the State of Emergency in the earthquake-affected region and the inability to access the courts have both made it harder for women to document their current status and caused adversarial divorce cases to take even longer, thereby subjecting women to continued violence in the process.

Finally, support is provided in accordance with the physical conditions of houses at the time of the earthquakes, which shows that the needs of women and children in the aftermath of the earthquakes are not holistically addressed. Some of the women who reached us said that their houses were slightly damaged and were reported as fit to live in, thereby they could not benefit from several types of assistance. They expressed that even if their houses were physically habitable, it has become difficult for them to live in the province, the disaster has left a psychological impact on them and their children, making it unbearable for them to stay there. For instance, a woman talked about the challenges her child faced that impacted their daily life involving sleeping, waking up or communicating with people. She said she could not continue to live in the same province because of this and she migrated to another province without her husband who inflicted violence on her, but she found it very difficult to access support in the new province.

Needs of young women

High school or university students stressed their demands mostly for computers or grants in addition to their demands for basic needs. Some students in the earthquake-affected region who prepare for exams or their mothers or some young women who continued their education in the affected region demanded computers or education grants. Young women mentioned that their families struggled to meet their basic needs and their siblings were in need of grants. Some young women students said that they could not find a platform to talk about the emotional burden created by the circumstances and they wanted to share how they felt. Guilt, despair and hopelessness were among the most expressed feelings by these young women. In our meetings with them, we discussed how we could cope with these feelings, noting that it was normal to feel this way.

Young women who had been preparing for exams or studying saw their whole way of life changed because of the earthquakes. In particular, young women who had already faced pressure at home prior to the earthquakes to drop the school or not to take the university exam stressed that accommodation was their priority need to be able to refocus on their education. Women living with their families in tent cities noted that physical circumstances already made it harder for them to work, and on top of this, the pressure on them not to work, which went back prior to the earthquakes, persisted by statements like “is now the time for this?” They were held responsible for the care of family members with health problems, they added.

Some young women stated that they put in a great effort to benefit from a post-earthquake support and be placed, away from their families, in the dormitories of the Higher Education Credit and Dormitories Institution (KYK). After having relocated due to the earthquake, young women also put forward their economic demands for their transportation to the

province where their schools were located as well as for a short-term stay to be able to take the exam. Women described the importance of taking the exam as “being free, enrolling in any major course in a university and being able to stay in a KYK dormitory”, stressing that this was a necessary step to get away from the family home.

Experiences of women living apart from men

Women experiencing violence, even if they are not officially divorced yet, may distance themselves from the environment of violence and start a new life. Some women were at the point of building a new life for themselves when the earthquakes hit. They told us that, even though they have been living apart from their abusers, they have faced major challenges in accessing post-earthquake support in case their divorce litigation was not finalised, or their new residential address was not updated in the system.

A woman who called us seeking financial assistance said that she has been living apart from her husband before she could get divorced. She has been living together with her sisters and mother who was also divorced when the earthquakes hit their home city. They had to leave their damaged house and since they were all women living alone, they could not keep vigil at the side of their belongings in the debris and all their possessions were stolen. “Men in neighbouring families kept vigil at their damaged houses, but we could not do this, we did not feel safe at night as women. There were not any lightning on the streets. We have heard of stories of harassment. Everything we had, including pvc windows, were stolen”, she said. Once again, we saw that the lack of efforts to provide a safe environment for women in the affected regions caused women to suffer financial damage.

A woman, who had been put under serious pressure by her husband to agree to a second wife in a polygamous marriage and suffered violence when she objected to it, told us that she moved in with her own family after the earthquakes and has been staying with them for a while, but she has not filed for divorce yet. When she asked for economic support available to earthquake victims, she was turned down because she had been with her parental family at the time of the earthquake; they told her “Your father received economic support for the household you are currently in, and your husband received economic support for the other household. You cannot receive it”. A woman who was living apart from her husband and was relocated to a dormitory with her family in the aftermath of the earthquakes said, “At the dormitory, we were told that 2 persons from every household could each get 3 pieces of clothing items. They considered me and my child to be in the same household with my parental family. I could only get 2 underpants and a piece of socks for my child. I tried to explain but they would not listen or give me support in my own right”. Another woman told us that she was living apart from her husband because of the violence he inflicted on her. She was rescued from the rubble and transferred with her child to another province for treatment. When she wanted to receive the one-off post-earthquake aid provided by AFAD, she was told that the aid was given to her husband because her address of residence was still the same as his and that she could not receive this aid.

A woman told us that when the earthquake hit, she had been living with her children in their house. She had the house registered with an annotation designating the house as

a family residence and she and her husband were living separately pending a divorce litigation. She added that he was living abroad and did not contribute to the care of their children. Prior to the earthquakes, she was trying to make a living on daily jobs and on the socio-economic support she got for her children. In the aftermath of the earthquakes, her options for daily jobs were significantly reduced due to the massive scale of damaged buildings in the region. She said that she has been living in an informal tent with her neighbours because her house was moderately damaged. She added that she applied for insurance support given to houses damaged by the earthquake, but she was told that she could not receive the cash-aid as the title deed was in her husband's name and the cash aid would be directly sent to the owner of the title deed. This case and many other similar cases show that women are disregarded also by the legal framework, even basic support is given again to men even if they are not the ones who survived the earthquake. With respect to the prevention of violence, we once again saw the importance of having support mechanisms designed in consideration of specific needs of women, focusing on women as opposed to the family, so that women who could free themselves of an environment of violence do not have to return to the perpetrator of violence.

Our meetings with women who live with their children and apart from men demonstrate that male violence also manifests in the form of men not taking any responsibility in the upbringing of children or housekeeping. As was the case in pre-earthquake, men continue not to provide any support to women in post-earthquake. A woman said that her husband was sending her only a small amount of money for their children, "I know that he does this so that I remain stuck with him", she said. A woman affected by the earthquakes while she had been living apart from her husband and planning to file for divorce said that she was living in a dormitory and finding it difficult to meet the needs of her child post-earthquake and that her husband kept the child's belongings from her to force her to return to him and to the environment of violence. Men have continued to use children as a tool for violence in the post-earthquake period. A woman, who had started to live apart from her husband prior to the earthquakes but had not filed for divorce yet, told us that her husband talked one of her children into staying with him and was not allowing her to see the child.

Experiences of women with support mechanisms that are obligated to combat violence against women

In the aftermath of the earthquakes, women tried to access support either in their home province or in the provinces they had to migrate to. We saw that support mechanisms do not have any standardisation and practices vary based on provinces.

A woman, who had been living apart from her husband but had not filed for divorce prior to the earthquakes, told us that she was transferred to a hospital in a larger province to get treatment and then moved in with a relative in that province with her extended family. She said that her husband talked one of her children into staying with him and did not let her see the child. She enrolled her child at a school in the metropolitan city

she has started to live in. Social Services Center officials, informed by the school, paid her a home visit, provided dry food assistance and put them under consideration for financial support. In a similar case involving a woman who had been living apart from her abusive husband prior to the earthquakes, the woman had to relocate to another province with her extended family in the aftermath of the disaster and enrolled her children in school in the new province, but she was not contacted by the Social Services Center. With our guidance, she reached the Center and demanded social economic support and earthquake aid.

Inconsistencies in implementation are apparent also in the replies given to women in response to their demands for access to a women's shelter. A woman who demanded to be placed in a women's shelter in another province was told that she had to travel to the province in question by her own means and directly make the demand there, even though her life was at risk, and she could not even afford the travel fee. On the other hand, another woman who demanded to stay in a women's shelter was told that the shelter was closed due to the earthquake, and she could not be transferred to a women's shelter in another province on the same day, so she was taken to a ŞÖNİM building to spend the night.

In addition, we saw that women could not access support that they had a right to, because of the complete ineffectiveness of public support mechanisms in post-earthquake, which were already cumbersome at the best of times. A woman whose children has serious health problems told us that she had to migrate to another province in the aftermath of the earthquakes and when she applied to the Social Services Center for assistance, she was told that before they could give her any kind of support, she needed to present documents showing that she had filed for divorce. She faced challenges to access the relevant institutions, and hence the documents, in her home province because of the massive scale destruction caused by the earthquakes. A woman whose divorce proceedings continued in the affected region had to regularly move between provinces to see her child as her husband had the custody of the child. However, since the child visitation center was damaged by the earthquake, she asked to see her child in the province she was living in but was told "You could only see the child in visitation centres where the child resides". In fact, we found out that the relevant law refers to a "place of residence" and according to the best interests of the child, the parent can meet the child at an address indicated by the parties, regardless of the place of mandatory (formal) residence address. Nonetheless, the woman was threatened by her husband who inflicted violence on her and kept her child away. She could not see her child for about two months. This case reveals the difficulty to access post-earthquake mechanisms as well the many ambiguous aspects of the pilot child visitation centres in practice.

Women who have experienced violence post-earthquakes are still in need of access to a women's shelter. We saw that women in need of access to a women's shelter in the affected region contacted law enforcement demanding for shelter, but the practices varied based on the province and women faced challenges in accessing support in this regard and at times could not receive support at all, even including women whose lives were at risk. A woman said that she was denied access to a women's shelter in a less affected province which had in fact an open shelter. She was left on the street with nowhere to go, afraid that her husband would find her and her children. The woman said she had had several restraining orders issued against him because of his repeated violence against her and threats to kill her and their children but he, in

defiance of the restraining orders, came to the house several times and made threats. Still, when she appealed to the law enforcement units under these circumstances, they determined that her need was only for accommodation. A woman told us that she was turned down by a law enforcement officer who said, “vacancy is limited due to the earthquakes. We cannot accept people based on their need for accommodation. If this had been a need for a women’s shelter, we would have you transferred to another province. There is nothing to do, this is a decision made by ŞÖNİM. The most we can do is to give you a tent.”

Challenges posed by the role of a “rescuer” in volunteer support

Volunteer groups that provide support in the affected region, tend to act from a “you must definitely get some support” perspective with respect to women who tell them of their experience of violence or whom they observe to be experiencing violence, referring them to institutions where they can get support accompanied by some solutions that they found on behalf of these women. When these women reached us, it so happened that they sometimes did not express the same demands mentioned by the volunteers, nor did they express any experience of violence. In such cases we still met with these women and told them that they could reach Mor Çatı whenever they needed to. Furthermore, we witnessed that volunteers from time-to-time contacted, on behalf of these women and without their permission, some institutions or persons that they believed would be helpful and shared the personal information of the women. This role of a “rescuer” of sorts taken on by volunteers in their relationship with these women has put the women’s confidentiality and safety at risk. Indeed, we well know that no woman is a rescuer or a rescuee; and women experiencing violence need solidarity not assistance, they need empowerment, not to be rescued. On the other hand, this situation has shown us once again the importance of knowledge and awareness of gender and violence against women even in cases of efforts that are not directly related to women’s needs.

Conclusion

Although it has been 5 months since the earthquakes, we see that women's even basic needs are not met. Support mechanisms that they need to distance themselves from violence are not accessible in every region. We see that existing problems in implementation are further exacerbated by the devastation caused by the earthquakes and this situation creates a barrier for women to rebuilding their lives and distancing themselves from violence. The lack of a disaster management plan and an emergency action plan against violence aggravates the barriers facing women in the earthquake affected region and migrated provinces.

On the other hand, women face lack of support and implementation as much in non-disaster times as in post-earthquake. Women always face a barrier in accessing services that they need due to the lack of needs-based and gender sensitive support mechanisms and the absence of standardisation in services, compounded by the fact that bad practices have no consequences. A poorly functioning support mechanism cannot respond to increased needs and challenging circumstances. Therefore, enhancing the quality of anti-violence and social support mechanisms and adopting a gender perspective in the implementation of these mechanisms would minimise the problems encountered in times of disaster.

EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN THE EARTHQUAKE AFFECTED REGION IN SUPPORT MECHANISMS AND IN THEIR ATTEMPTS TO DISTANCE THEMSELVES FROM VIOLENCE



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