


Protecting the health of pregnant women in Turkey and Syria earthquake-affected areas: Challenges and opportunities

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Sirwan Khalid Ahmed^{1,2}  and Renas Mohammed Khdhir¹

Dear Editor,

A 7.8-magnitude earthquake hit Turkey and Syria on 6 February 2023, followed by multiple aftershocks and a 7.6-magnitude earthquake that devastated the afflicted territories. The recent earthquakes in Turkey and Syria have caused significant damage to infrastructure,¹ leaving many pregnant women without access to essential healthcare services. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), there are currently more than 226,000 pregnant women in Turkey and 130,000 in Syria among earthquake survivors who require immediate access to reproductive healthcare.²

Pregnancy is a crucial time in a woman's life, and it is important to prioritize the health and well-being of both the mother and the unborn child. However, earthquakes have made it challenging for pregnant women to access prenatal care, including check-ups, ultrasound scans, and other critical services. The destruction of hospitals and medical centers has left pregnant women vulnerable and at risk.

One of the most significant challenges faced by pregnant women in the aftermath of earthquakes is the lack of access to essential healthcare services. Many women have been unable to attend their regular check-ups, which are vital for monitoring the health of the mother and the developing baby. In some cases, pregnant women have had to travel long distances to reach the nearest medical facility, which can be time-consuming and dangerous, particularly for those who are in the later stages of pregnancy.

The lack of access to medical care has also made it difficult for pregnant women to receive the necessary medication and treatment for pre-existing conditions. Pregnant women with pre-existing medical conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, or heart disease require specialized care to manage their condition and protect the health of their baby. The destruction of hospitals and medical centers has made it challenging for these women to receive the care they need,¹ putting their health and the health of their unborn child at risk.

In addition to the lack of access to healthcare services, earthquakes have caused significant psychological trauma and stress.¹ Pregnant women who have experienced the earthquake may be experiencing fear, anxiety, and depression, which can have long-term effects on their mental health.³ The fear of aftershocks, displacement, and loss of loved ones can be particularly challenging for pregnant women, leading to a range of mental health problems.

The mental health of pregnant women is an essential component of maternal health, and it is critical to provide support and assistance to those who are experiencing stress and anxiety. Mental health support services should be made available to pregnant women in the affected regions, to help them cope with the psychological trauma of the earthquakes.

Another significant challenge faced by pregnant women in the aftermath of the earthquakes is the risk of complications during childbirth. Giving birth in unsafe and unsanitary conditions can increase the risk of infection and other complications, which can be life-threatening for both the mother and the baby. Many pregnant women have been forced to give birth at home, without the assistance of trained medical professionals, increasing the risk of complications and adverse outcomes.

To address these challenges, it is essential to prioritize the rebuilding of healthcare infrastructure in the affected regions. Hospitals and medical centers must be rebuilt and strengthened, to ensure that pregnant women have access to the essential healthcare services they need. Medical staff must be trained and equipped to provide specialized

¹Department of Nursing, University of Raparin, Rania, Iraq

²Department of Pediatrics, Rania Pediatric & Maternity Teaching Hospital, Rania, Iraq

Corresponding author:

Sirwan Khalid Ahmed, Department of Nursing, University of Raparin, Rania 46012, Iraq.

Emails: sirwan.ahmed1989@gmail.com; sirwan.k.ahmed@uor.edu.krd



care to pregnant women, particularly those with pre-existing medical conditions.

In addition to rebuilding healthcare infrastructure, it is essential to provide pregnant women with the necessary medical supplies and equipment. This includes medication, medical equipment, and other essential supplies that are required for safe childbirth. Pregnant women should also be provided with access to emergency transport services, to ensure that they can reach medical facilities quickly and safely.

In conclusion, the recent earthquakes in Turkey and Syria have had a devastating impact on pregnant women in the affected regions. The lack of access to essential healthcare services, the risk of complications during childbirth, and the psychological trauma and stress experienced by pregnant women are significant challenges that must be addressed.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable

Consent for publication

Not applicable

Author contribution(s)

Sirwan Khalid Ahmed: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Renas Mohammed Khdhir: Investigation, Resources, Validation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing.

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ORCID iD

Sirwan Khalid Ahmed  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8361-0546>

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