

Review Article

The Impact of Culture on the Elderly after Earthquakes: A Narrative Review

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Abstract

Post-earthquake elderly care requires a cultural approach, playing a crucial role in supporting the physical, psychological, and social well-being of elderly individuals. The cultural context of elderly individuals determines their responses to disasters and coping strategies significantly. Especially in culturally diverse regions, care that considers elderly cultural values and beliefs positively influences post-traumatic adaptation processes. Elderly life experiences, traditions, and social support networks can enhance feelings of resilience and well-being during crises. Moreover, culturally appropriate interventions enable elderly individuals to express their emotional and physical needs more accurately, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of care. Thus, preserving cultural sensitivity in elderly care is vital for the community's post-earthquake recovery process and essential for its sustainability.

Keywords: Earthquakes, Elderly Care, Cultural Competency, Social Support

Introduction

Disasters, although not new phenomena, have increased in intensity and frequency due to climate change, globalization, rapid urbanization, and environmental degradation, with projections for further escalation (Daddoust et al., 2018; Jagnoor et al., 2019; Kwan, 2020). Elderly individuals are classified as a vulnerable group disproportionately affected by disasters (Daddoust et al., 2018; Jagnoor et al., 2019; Kwan, 2020). Reports indicate that during Hurricane Katrina (2005), 75% of disaster-related deaths were among elderly individuals, while in Japan's 2011 tsunami and Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, the figures were 56% and 23%, respectively (Kwan, 2020). Health inequalities worsen during disaster periods. Understanding the specific needs, cultures, and norms of individuals, groups, and populations during disasters is essential for reducing health disparities (Danna et al., 2015). Understanding the various aspects of vulnerability can assist healthcare providers, especially nurses, in managing disaster risks for this growing population (Daddoust et al., 2018).

Elderly adults have diverse religious and cultural backgrounds that influence their perspectives on and access to services and government institutions. Cultural differences such as ethnic origin, socioeconomic status, and language create a form of vulnerability for some elderly adults (Lamb et al., 2008). Healthcare providers and systems can improve health outcomes for elderly adults post-disaster by including elderly patients and communities in pre-disaster planning steps. During disasters, elderly care should consider the differences in elderly individuals' living environments, health conditions, and capacities (Bank, 2013). Factors determining the severity of emergencies and disasters on elderly individuals include the type and intensity of the danger, as well as the characteristics of the elderly and their environments, cultural considerations, and the effectiveness of disaster management systems. Pre-disaster planning should consider the vulnerabilities of elderly individuals and the problems they may face during disasters in all dimensions (Cakir, 2020). Survivors respond to and recover from disaster events within the context of their own

cultures and beliefs. Therefore, it is crucial for healthcare providers to understand the specific needs, cultures, and norms of individuals, groups, and populations (Danna et al., 2015). Special competencies are required for comprehensive service delivery to those affected in post-disaster management. These competencies should include abilities such as cultural competence, which encompasses knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs (Hadimin, 2021). A systematic review identified five main needs of elderly individuals in urban disaster response across various fields including disaster management, gerontology, and urban governance based on an examination of 120 publications. These needs include health, socioeconomic support, evacuation and resettlement, information and communication, and cultural needs. It was found that the cultural needs of elderly individuals are often under-researched and overlooked in disaster response (Phraknoi et al., 2023). A study investigating the effects of natural disasters in Bangladesh's Barisal region and communities' preparedness and coping strategies highlighted inadequate support and cultural barriers affecting vulnerable groups such as women, children, and elderly individuals (Jagnoor et al., 2019).

Cultural competence-based care planning and practices by nurses play a vital role in providing effective support to victims during the disaster cycle. Nursing education should emphasize a culturally sensitive approach to vulnerable groups. These trainings enable nurses to gain competence in this area through various methods (traditional, online, virtual), allowing them to act based on cultural competence principles during disasters for effective health outcomes (Danna et al., 2015).

Culture shapes people's experiences in these processes, determines how they develop coping and adaptation strategies, and influences the acceptability of mental health services, particularly during disasters (Rahmani et al., 2022). Understanding the effects of disasters and developing appropriate responses highlight the importance of cultural values and beliefs. Cultural approaches, especially for the elderly, play a critical role in providing psychosocial support after disasters. Elderly individuals often use traditional knowledge,

beliefs, and social ties to cope with disasters. For example, while some cultures accept natural disasters as part of fate, others interpret them as a consequence of human destruction of nature. These perspectives can influence how the elderly experience guilt, responsibility, and loss feelings during disasters. Cultural approaches are crucial in developing measures that support the mental health of the elderly after disasters and strengthen social solidarity (Rahmani, 2022). Literature has emphasized focusing on religion to enhance the resilience of the elderly in disasters (Phraknoi et al., 2023). What makes the elderly less vulnerable than the rest of the community is not only the personal and social integrity of the elderly, but also the community's commitment to support the elderly. Honor, dignity, and religious values help determine how to cope with difficult situations in life and manage and manage problems (Dadoust et al., 2018).

Research conducted in Filipino culture has found that the religious/spiritual beliefs of elderly women help them maintain hope about their current and future situations during disaster scenarios. Participants emphasized that prayers and trust in God assist them in coping with challenges such as health issues and lack of social support (Kwan, 2020). A study investigating the mental health effects of elderly Buddhists after the Wenchuan earthquake in China showed that religious beliefs helped Buddhists recover from trauma, especially in severely affected regions (Wang et al., 2012). In a qualitative study conducted in Iran in 2016 with 24 elderly individuals using semi-structured interview forms, it was demonstrated that age alone is not the sole criterion making an elderly person vulnerable; rather, their lifelong achievements and experiences determine their vulnerability levels. Due to cultural reasons, it is expected that family members and children will provide support and care to elderly family members in times of hardship, thus enabling them to live with dignity. Religious beliefs among Iranian elderly individuals are seen as a significant source of support, influencing their decision-making during challenging times and believed to alleviate the pain and panic that arise. Some elderly individuals reported experiencing strengthened faith following a disaster,

believing that disasters increased their commitment to their beliefs and brought them closer to God. Research findings indicated that elderly individuals engage in religious acts such as praying, reciting prayers, reading, and listening to sacred texts (Quran) to help themselves cope (Daddoust et al., 2018). Following the Bam earthquake in Iran in 2003, a qualitative study involving 56 elderly individuals identified their perceived needs through focus group discussions. Results were evaluated through content analysis, identifying four main themes among the elderly: inappropriate service delivery, compromised dignity, feelings of mistrust, and emotional distress. The study highlighted the strong impact of elderly individuals' community positions, socio-economic statuses, and cultural backgrounds on how they perceive emergency aid and respond to it. In Islam and Iranian culture, respecting the elderly is a norm, leading elderly individuals to benefit from various forms of social support, although many of these supports may no longer be available post-disaster. Deeming a respected elderly individual unnecessary in a challenging survival environment can lead to increased mental and emotional wounds (Ardalan et al., 2010). A study conducted after the Canterbury earthquake in New Zealand on February 22, 2011, with elderly evacuees from damaged care facilities emphasized the importance of access to culturally appropriate social services. The expectation for children, especially daughters, to set aside their own goals to care for elderly or disabled parents emerged prominently (Jaye et al., 2015).

Cultural Approaches After Earthquakes

Culturally sensitive planning and responses are essential to meet the needs of elderly individuals during disasters (Ahmadi et al., 2018). Services offered to majority groups post-disaster may not be suitable for minority groups. Organizations providing disaster relief in areas where a significant portion of the population belongs to a minority group should ideally hire bilingual and bicultural staff. Clinicians need multicultural training to ensure the sensitive handling of needs among elderly adults from minority backgrounds. Written materials should be provided in the language of minority elderly adults or developed as needed (Lamb et al., 2008). Participants involved in the Yushu

Earthquake relief efforts encountered dual challenges such as cultural conflicts and language barriers. It was concluded that cultural conflicts reflect deficiencies in cultural competence, suggesting that socio-cultural knowledge and skills should be integrated into disaster nursing education and, more fundamentally, into nursing undergraduate education (Wenji et al., 2015). In Iran, elderly adults affected by earthquakes responded to challenges post-disaster in two main categories: adaptive and maladaptive responses. Adaptive responses were developed based on factors such as religious coping, sharing emotions and knowledge, coping with new activities, and redefining roles. Maladaptive responses included reluctance to seek aid materials, excessive dependence, and decreased social activities. The study recommended that service providers identify and manage vulnerabilities and cultural sensitivities in elderly adults' responses. Furthermore, it emphasized that individuals with adaptive responses could make significant contributions in rescue efforts and post-disaster psychological support programs (Ahmadi et al., 2018). In traditional societies, it is noted that elderly individuals contribute to peace, social justice, and the reconstruction of society post-accidents and disasters. They also play a role in preserving community culture and social identity. Utilizing the capacities and abilities of elderly individuals post-accidents and disasters is beneficial for both the community and enhances their independence and self-confidence (Khankeh et al., 2020). After the acute phase, people may express their grief and enter a mourning period using traditional methods, which is necessary to avoid unresolved losses. These practices promote collaboration, support communities and individuals, and help alleviate feelings of emptiness (Marutani et al., 2021). Research underscores the importance of cultural diversity in disaster risk reduction and post-disaster recovery processes. It highlights the need to consider local culture, shared behaviors, and values that form local knowledge in planning and implementing interventions and recovery efforts (Marutani et al., 2020).

Emergency relief managers must consider traditional forms of assistance suitable for

many elderly individuals in disaster areas, assess and address their urgent and long-term needs. Training aid agencies to be sensitive to age and addressing the rights of the elderly in both intervention and recovery phases is crucial (Edward, 2014). Literature emphasizes how strong and empowering relationships with elderly individuals can be facilitated by a government-funded active support institution that responds immediately to needs and deeply respects the worldviews of vulnerable groups (Yotsui, 2016). A study examining adults' health-related quality of life post-Katrina and Rita hurricanes in 2005 found gender-specific differences in religious beliefs and coping methods. Women's religious coping strategies were highlighted, demonstrating how nurses used culture during different stages of disaster to provide solace to affected individuals. Nurses endeavored to enhance community resilience by considering local culture from the emergency phase through to medium and long-term phases. These findings underscore the importance of preserving and adapting culture to strengthen community resilience post-disaster. Nurses should assess hidden grief, sustain expressions of those evacuated without reshaping them, and support hidden mourning (Dietrich, 2016).

Conclusion and Recommendations: In conclusion, cultural sensitivity and understanding play pivotal roles in addressing the needs of elderly adults in post-disaster. Research highlights the importance of tailored responses that respect cultural diversity, ensuring effective support for minority groups and enhancing community resilience. Adaptive responses among elderly individuals, such as religious coping and community engagement, are valuable assets that should be leveraged in disaster relief and recovery efforts. Moving forward, it is essential for emergency response organizations to integrate multicultural training for personnel and develop culturally appropriate materials. This approach will not only improve service delivery but also foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for vulnerable populations in times of crisis.

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