



Letter to the Editor

Older Adults Living Alone: A Neglected Population in Times of Disaster

Ameneh Marzban^{1*} 

¹ Department of Health in Disasters and Emergencies, School of Health Management and Information Sciences, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

* **Corresponding Author:** Department of Health in Disasters and Emergencies, School of Health Management and Information Sciences, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. **Tel:** +989172458896, **Email address:** amenemarzban@yahoo.com

Received 9 July 2025

Citation: Marzban A. Older adults living alone: a neglected population in times of disaster. *Elderly Health Journal*. 2025; 11(2): 73.

In a world increasingly shaped by the frequency and severity of natural disasters and public health emergencies, one vulnerable group continues to be systematically overlooked: older adults who live alone (1). From devastating earthquakes to global pandemics, disasters expose the structural gaps in our preparedness systems, gaps through which far too many older individuals fall (2). As societies strive to build more inclusive and resilient emergency responses, now is the time to bring attention to this neglected population (3).

Older adults living alone are at heightened risk during disasters for several reasons (4). Physically, many face reduced mobility, making evacuation or access to aid challenging. Cognitively, they may struggle to process fast-moving updates or retain critical instructions (1). Socially, isolation deprives them of nearby support networks, increasing their vulnerability (5). When the power fails or emergency alerts sound, many older adults face danger not due to frailty but due to solitude (6).

The COVID-19 pandemic starkly illustrated the consequences of this neglect (7). Studies from various countries revealed that older adults living alone were more likely to experience psychological distress, food insecurity, and delayed medical care during lockdowns (1). Their risk extended beyond the virus itself to the cascading effects of isolation, miscommunication, and systemic oversight. These lessons, however, risk being forgotten as global attention shifts to new emergencies (2, 3, 5).

Ultimately, redefining the concept of community resilience is essential. Resilience must encompass not only infrastructure and logistics but also the social fabric that binds individuals together (1, 4, 5, 7). A truly resilient community is one that safeguards its most isolated members not just during crises, but in the everyday systems that precede and follow them (5, 6).

Policymakers, humanitarian organizations, and concerned citizens must shift the focus of disaster preparedness and response to include isolated and

vulnerable older adults. This population deserves targeted interventions, inclusive communication strategies, and proactive support mechanisms. Their safety is not a peripheral concern it is a measure of our collective humanity.

References

1. Abbasian M, Ghojzadeh M, Sarbazi E, Safaralipour M, Hamishehkar H, Soleimanpour H. Challenges of older people experienced after an earthquake disaster situation: a neglected issue. *Journal of Research in Clinical Medicine*. 2023; 11(1): 1-7.
2. Ahmadi S, Khankeh H, Sahaf R, Dalvandi A, Hosseini SA. Daily life challenges in an earthquake disaster situation in older adults: A qualitative study in Iran. *Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research*. 2018; 12(4): 8-12.
3. Khodadadi H, Vatankhah S, Sadeghi T. Indexes of caring for elderly in earthquakes according to the Iranian experience: a qualitative study. *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*. 2018; 12(4): 493-501.
4. Kar N. Care of older persons during and after disasters: meeting the challenge. *Journal of Geriatric Care and Research*; 2016; 3(1): 7-12.
5. Khankeh HR, Ahmadi S, Sahaf R, Dalvandi A, Hosseini SA. Life changes of the elderly after earthquake: a qualitative study in Iran. *Health in Emergencies and Disasters Quarterly*. 2020; 6(1): 9-16.
6. Daddoust L, Khankeh H, Ebadi A, Sahaf R, Nakhaei M, Asgary A. The vulnerability of the Iranian elderly in disasters: Qualitative content analysis. *Iranian Journal of Nursing and Midwifery Research*. 2018; 23(5): 402-8.
7. Briguglio M, Giorgino R, Dell'Osso B, Cesari M, Porta M, Lattanzio F, et al. Consequences for the elderly after COVID-19 isolation: FEaR (frail elderly amid restrictions). *Frontiers in Psychology*. 2020; 11: 1-5.