

Studia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego
Zeszyt 39 (2026)
ISSN 2028-2677, s. 31-56
DOI: 10.37055/sbn/224745

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Wojskowa Akademia Techniczna
w Warszawie

National Security Studies
Volume 39 (2026)
ISSN 2028-2677, pp. 31-56
DOI: 10.37055/sbn/224745

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THE ROLE OF HUMAN-PLACE RELATIONSHIPS IN POST-EARTHQUAKE PSYCHOSOCIAL RESILIENCE: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CASE OF ANTAKYA

ROLA RELACJI MIĘDZY CZŁOWIEKIEM A OTOCZENIEM W ODPORNOŚCI PSYCHOSPOŁECZNEJ PO TRZĘSIENIU ZIEMI: INTERPRETACYJNA ANALIZA FENOMENOLOGICZNA PRZYPADKU ANTIOCHII

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Abstract. In 2023, earthquakes centered in Kahramanmaraş on February 6 and Antakya (Hatay) on February 20 claimed the lives of thousands of people, injured thousands more, and destroyed or damaged a significant portion of the housing stock. As a result, people were displaced and began living in container cities, which are referred to as temporary housing. This forced displacement and life in a container city have caused survivors to face various difficulties. This study aims to investigate the experiences of Antakya earthquake survivors regarding displacement and life in container cities, as well as their perceptions of the future of their city, based on a theoretical framework of place identity and socio-ecology. The study employed an interpretive phenomenological approach. Ten individuals (eight women and two men) aged 30–78 years were recruited. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in face-to-face meetings with the participants from January to February 2025. The data analysis yielded four main themes: (1) Neighbourhood as Home, (2) Displacement, (3) Container City Life, and (4) What Kind of Future? Living with Uncertainty. These themes reflected participants' relationships with their neighbourhoods, their experiences of displacement and container living, and their concerns and expectations regarding the future of Antakya. Based on the results of the study and its theoretical framework, this research proposes a place-based conceptual model that incorporates contextual and experiential factors that are potentially associated with psychosocial well-being following an earthquake. In this context, post-disaster temporary

sheltering and placement in permanent housing should be carried out with consideration for appropriate physical conditions and sociocultural dynamics, which can pave the way for a natural process based on social capital—including components of psychological resilience and well-being—for survivors.

Abstrakt. Trzęsienia ziemi 6 lutego 2023 r., których epicentrum znajdowało się w Kahramanmaraş, oraz 20 lutego 2023 r., którego epicentrum znajdowało się w Antiochii/Hatay, doprowadziły do śmierci tysięcy osób, spowodowały liczne obrażenia oraz zniszczyły lub poważnie uszkodziły znaczną część zasobów mieszkaniowych. W konsekwencji wiele osób zostało przymusowo przesiedlonych i zamieszkało w osiedlach kontenerowych, traktowanych jako tymczasowe miejsca zamieszkania. Przymusowe przesiedlenie oraz życie w osiedlach kontenerowych wiązały się dla osób ocalałych z trzęsienia ziemi z wieloma trudnościami. Niniejsze badanie ma na celu zbadanie doświadczeń osób ocalałych z trzęsienia ziemi w Antiochii, w zakresie przymusowego przesiedlenia oraz życia w osiedlach kontenerowych, a także ich postrzeganie przyszłości miasta, w oparciu o ramy teoretyczne tożsamości miejsca oraz podejścia społeczno-ekologicznego. W badaniu zastosowano interpretacyjne podejście fenomenologiczne. Do udziału w badaniu zrekrutowano dziesięć osób (osiem kobiet i dwóch mężczyzn) w wieku od 30 do 78 lat. Dane zebrano za pomocą częściowo ustrukturyzowanych wywiadów przeprowadzonych podczas bezpośrednich spotkań z uczestnikami w okresie od stycznia do lutego 2025 r. W tym kontekście, z tym proces zapewniania tymczasowego schronienia po katastrofie oraz późniejszego zakwaterowania w stałych mieszkaniach powinien uwzględniać zarówno odpowiednie warunki fizyczne, jak i dynamikę społeczno-kulturową. Takie podejście może wspierać naturalny proces odbudowy oparty na kapitale społecznym, obejmujący również odporność psychiczną i dobrostan osób, które przeżyły katastrofę.

Keywords: earthquake, human–place relationship, container city, trauma, resilience.

Słowa kluczowe: trzęsienie ziemi, relacja człowiek-miejsce, miasto kontenerowe, trauma, odporność.

1. Introduction

Earthquakes are among the most destructive natural disasters. In addition to widespread social and economic impacts, such as loss of life, displacement, relocation, temporary housing, and reconstruction, they can lead to potential adverse psychological consequences for survivors. Furthermore, by altering the human–environment relationship through the loss of the environment and the change to daily living spaces, earthquakes can have a profound effect on communities (Sirolich & Camisasca, 2024; Shojaei & Fallahi, 2023; Usluoglu, 2025; Usluoglu & Atılgan, 2025). One of the place where these effects are particularly evident is Antakya. As the capital of Hatay Province, Antakya is renowned for its multicultural and multiethnic social structure, as well as its tangible cultural heritage, which reflects this diversity (Aydın et al., 2025; Can, 2025). Among the regions affected by the earthquakes that struck Turkey on 6 and 20 February, Antakya, the central city of Hatay Province, experienced the most damage. Nearly half of the earthquake-related deaths (22,000) occurred in Hatay Province (Republic of Turkey Ministry of the Interior, Disaster and Emergency Presidency, 2023). According to data from the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (2023), of the 587 registered cultural heritage structures in Antakya, including waqf properties, 186 were destroyed, 175 were severely damaged, 84 were moderately damaged and 67 were slightly damaged. Additionally, 85% of the city's buildings have been destroyed. This destruction led

to difficulties in meeting basic needs, including shelter, access to food, and basic health services, which forced survivors to leave the city. A few months after the earthquake, those who did not leave the city and those who returned to the city settled in container cities, which were used as temporary shelters.

Containers are used as temporary shelters/housing for those in need of crisis circumstances, but they cause various problems, including design, environmental conditions, and sociocultural issues (Bashawri et al., 2014; Félix et al., 2013; Peternel & Podjed, 2024). Thus, survivors of the February 6 and 20 earthquakes have to cope not only with the multidimensional effects of exposure to the earthquake and loss of loved ones but also with the challenges of forced displacement and temporary container life due to the destruction of their homes and neighborhoods (Sirotich & Camisasca, 2024; Schober & Abrahamsen, 2022). Hence, earthquake survivors face various psychological problems and vulnerabilities that require a long recovery process (Çınaroğlu et al., 2024, preprint). It is important to develop psychosocial support interventions against these vulnerabilities. On the other hand, understanding the impact of disasters and catastrophes at the community level requires a place-based understanding of these effects and interventions to be carried out at the individual and social levels (Cutter et al., 2008; Knez et al., 2018a; Oldfield & Stevenson, 2024). In line with this understanding, the current study aims to investigate the experiences of loss of place, displacement, experiences of living in a container, and perceptions about the future.

In this context, the current study aims to evaluate the survivors of earthquakes that took place on February 6 and 20 in Antakya in terms of relocation, the meaning and challenges of container life, and the future of the city. This study is guided by place identity theory (Knez et al., 2018a) and a socioecological resilience perspective (Oldfield & Stevenson, 2024), and it uses interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith et al., 2009). We believe that the study's findings inform both research and practice on postdisaster psychological well-being and resilience by clarifying how place-based meanings and socioecological contexts shape recovery after earthquakes.

The research questions presented in the article are as follows:

- How do participants describe their lives before the earthquake?
- How did the participants experience leaving the place where they lived?
- How do the participants describe their experience of living in a container city?
- What are the participants' perceptions about the future?

Literature verification

Home is the place that is the center of people's lives, where they experience security and comfort and obtain their identity (Shorting et al., 2024). It can refer

to large areas such as neighborhoods and cities where people live and where social and cultural encounters take place (Case, 1996; Meagher et al., 2024). These places carry meaning in many different ways for people, such as creating a sense of security, providing an environment for family life and employment, and serving as spaces for aesthetic experiences (Gesler, 1992). These living spaces are filled with residents' memories of personal and collective shared histories (Hosseini Koumleh et al., 2013). People attach meaning and connections to places, including home, and these places form part of their individual and collective identities (Knez et al., 2018a; Lengen et al., 2019; Meagher et al., 2024; Scannell & Gifford, 2017). This is why some people talk about 'going hometown' as going to their own "home" or "family home". In this sense, home can serve as a source of ontological security (Basu & Hettiarachchi, 2025). Despite the process of globalization and increased opportunities for relocation, "place" remains a strong object of attachment (Lewicka, 2011). Attachment to place emerges with and includes emotional bonds with the people living in that place (Meagher et al., 2024). Attachment to place and attachment to people are similar. For this reason, people tend to be close to places to which they are attached (Meagher et al., 2024). While disruption of place leads to feelings of anxiety and loss (e.g., eco-anxiety, solastalgia) (Albrecht et al., 2007; Cosh et al., 2024; Scannell & Gifford, 2017), disaster displacement may be experienced as a lack of self-identity (Oldfield & Stevenson, 2024). In addition, disaster displacement could be associated with greater psychological symptoms after a disaster (Puechlong et al., 2021).

Resilience processes formed by coping with and supporting resources are critical to the adaptation, recovery, and well-being of survivors after an earthquake (Kocyigit et al., 2024; Ni et al., 2020). These processes involve dynamic and reciprocal relationships among the characteristics of the individual, the nature of stressors, and environmental factors that affect how these factors are evaluated (Matheson et al., 2020). In this respect, resilience is evaluated in terms of individual, social, and cultural processes during disasters (Oldfield & Stevenson, 2024), depending on the context of the human–place relationship (Ni et al., 2020). By promoting cooperation, resource sharing, and adaptability during crises, social capital based on cultural practices strengthens resilience, particularly during crises such as disasters (Doğruel, 2024). If they have sufficient interpersonal, social, and cultural support, individuals can cope with the impact of traumatic stressors by using their resilience capacities in the face of mass traumatic experiences such as earthquakes (Abbasi & Nasir, 2023). For instance, those living in a community where neighbors help each other perceive greater individual- and community-level recovery after a major environmental disaster (Bergstrand & Mayer, 2020). However, relocation may result in individuals not being able to benefit from place-specific community support resources, such as psychosocial support, which are essential for their recovery. Therefore, from temporary shelters to the construction of permanent housing, it is

important to adopt a participatory and sociocultural dynamics-based approach in postdisaster interventions.

After a disaster, it is important for policymakers, relevant institutions and organizations, urban/city planners, and disaster management professionals to implement postdisaster reconstruction planning in a participatory and inclusive way (Doğruel, 2024). This inclusiveness involves local municipalities, local civil society organizations in disaster-affected areas, and universities conducting research on the subject in the organizational process.

It is also necessary to rebuild structures that are meaningful for residents, to replace demolished houses under appropriate conditions, to build houses in the neighborhood or close to the neighborhood before the disaster, and to consider the sociocultural dynamics of the construction process and resettlement (Aydin et al., 2025; KamaçI-Karahan & Kemeç, 2022). Such understanding could promote individual and community recovery components by maintaining place-based social ties and preserving collective identity. A noninclusive approach may cause survivors to experience uncertainty and hopelessness and negatively affect their recovery processes in the reconstruction planning process. In addition, placement in permanent housing that does not consider sociocultural dynamics may affect survivors' satisfaction with and commitment to their housing. For instance, survivors placed in permanent housing after the 2005 floods in Carlisle city in the UK experienced problems such as arguments and harassment, and some of them sold their homes and left the region (Carroll et al., 2009). After the Van earthquake in Turkey in 2011, residents placed in TOKİ housing without considering sociocultural dynamics reported low satisfaction levels with these houses (KamaçI-Karahan & Kemeç, 2022). Despite the reported literature results, it seems that the structure after the February 6 earthquake was not based on an inclusive understanding and sociocultural dynamics (Aydin et al., 2025).

Previous research on the experiences of survivors of the February 6 earthquake focuses on psychological symptoms (e.g., posttraumatic stress, depression, and anxiety) and the relationships of these symptoms with various variables (e.g., coping mechanisms, perceived social support, smoking status, emotion dysregulation, and mental symptoms) (Can Gür, 2024; Kocakaya et al., 2024; Kocyigit et al., 2024). A limited number of postearthquake studies have addressed the experiences of survivors on the basis of a phenomenological approach (Doğruel, 2024; Ural et al., 2024). However, these studies did not focus on human–place relations or place-based connections. In addition, the importance of safety, assurance, and predictability components, which are necessary for well-being after negative experiences, is emphasized less in research (Matheson et al., 2020). However, these components are related to the usual behavioral systems that create a sense of control, connection and meaning for survivors (Herman, 2015). They are also influenced by reconstruction politics (Aydin et al., 2025; KamaçI-Karahan & Kemeç, 2022), relationships with

others, and place-based connections (Carone et al., 2025; Knez et al., 2018a; Knez et al., 2018b; Meagher et al., 2024; Oldfield et al., 2024; Puechlong et al., 2021; Panday et al., 2021; Prayag et al., 2021; Scannell & Gifford, 2017; Sobhaninia et al., 2023).

2. Research methodology

This study used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith et al., 2009). Hence, this study aimed to examine the experiences and views of individuals who survived the earthquake and lived in container cities in Antakya regarding the meaning of place, relocation, and the city's reconstruction process.

2.1. Participants

This study included 10 participants (8 women and 2 men) aged 30–78 years. The participants left Antakya for periods of one month to one year. Table 1 presents the participants' earthquake-related traumatic experiences, posttraumatic stress scores, and detailed demographic information. The participants' exposure to the traumatic aspects of the earthquake was assessed using the ten items of the Traumatic Exposure Severity Scale developed by Elal and Slade (2005) (TESS-A; Elal & Slade, 2005). Posttraumatic stress symptoms were determined using the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist for the DSM-5 (PCL-5) developed by Weathers et al. (2013) and adapted into Turkish by Boysan et al. (2017). Exposure levels and PCL-5 scores were used to assess the participants' characteristics.

Table 1. Patient characteristics

PARTICIPANTS	EXPOSURE SCORE	PCL SCORE
case 1: 58 years old, female, teacher with master's degree, married with two children; she lives alone in a container city;	8	61
case 2: 46 years old, female, teacher with a bachelor's degree, married with three children; she lives in a container city with her husband and three children;	4	66
case 3: 55 years old, male, teacher with bachelor's degree, married with two children; he lives in a container city with his wife and children;	8	57
case 4: 30 years old, female, teacher with bachelor's degree, married with one child; she lives in a container city with her husband and daughter;	7	61
case 5: 35 years old, female, high school graduate, housewife, married with three children; she lives in a container city with her husband and three children;	5	68

case 6: 54 years old, female, primary school graduate, housewife, married; she lives with her husband in a container city;	5	67
case 7: 40 years old, female, primary school graduate, housewife, married with two sons; she lives in a container city with her husband and two sons;	6	49
case 8: 78 years old, male, primary school graduate, retired, married; he lives in a container city with his wife;	6	76
case 9: 63 years old, female, primary school graduate, retired. She lost her husband two years after the earthquake; she has six children (one boy and five girls); she lives in a container city with her son, daughter-in-law, and five grandchildren;	5	63
case 10: 35 years old, female, primary school graduate, housewife; she lost her husband in the earthquake; she currently lives in a container city with her two daughters aged 3 and 7.	7	78

Source: Exposure score, Traumatic Exposure Severity Scale; *PCL-5*, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist for DSM-5

When examining the descriptive statistics for scale scores, all participants ($n = 10$) scored above the cutoff score of 48 established for the *PCL-5* (Min = 49, Max = 78, $M = 64.60$). When evaluated by subscales, Avoidance symptoms stood out as the dimension closest to the maximum score ($M = 7.80/8$, 97.50%). Negative Alterations in Cognitions and Mood symptoms ($M = 21.80/28$, 77.90%), Re-experiencing symptoms ($M = 16.10/20$, 80.50%), and Arousal symptoms ($M = 19.10/24$, 79.60%) showed high group averages.

2.2. Researcher's Role

The first author of the study is an assistant professor in the field of psychology and has conducted qualitative research and studies on trauma psychology. He also grew up in Antakya, had a good command of the city's culture, participated in various aid efforts there after the earthquake, conducted research, and was a panelist. The second researcher is enrolled in the last year of the four-year undergraduate education in psychology. She has also taken courses on trauma psychology, intervention techniques for disasters, and qualitative research and has participated in various field studies with earthquake survivors. These competencies can contribute to ensuring that individuals' sensitivity to traumatic experiences is taken into account during the data collection process, that interviews are conducted in accordance with the purpose of the study, and that participants' distress responses are understood and managed during the interview.

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews using a semistructured interview (see Table 2) form in container cities from January–February 2025. The interviews, which lasted 20–45 minutes, were audio recorded. IPA guidelines were

considered in the preparation and analysis of the interview questions (Smith et al., 2009). Hence, before the data collection process, expert opinions were received to assess the clarity and comprehensibility of the questions, and a pilot interview was conducted before the actual interviews. The actual interviews were conducted by the second researcher under the supervision of the first researcher. When the actual data collection process started following the transcription and evaluation of the first interview, the second author conducted four additional interviews. After an overall analysis of these interviews through transcription, she continued with them. The coding of the data was revised in line with the concepts that emerged from the analysis of each participant's interview data. Throughout the process, in accordance with the IPA, the researchers tried to determine themes that were unique to each participant and shared in common as a group regarding the participants' experiences and views (Smith and Osborn, 2008). Owing to space limitations, repeated and less related excerpts concerning the themes were excluded. Triple dots were used to indicate the excluded statements, and not each participant's statement could be included under the themes.

Table 2. Semi-structured interview questions

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How would you describe your life before the earthquake? 2. How did leaving your home due to the earthquake affect you? What can you say about this? 3. What can you say about life in the container city? 4. What are your thoughts about the future? What kind of future awaits you? |
|---|

Source: Own study

2.4. *Trustworthiness*

The IPA guidelines were followed to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings (Smith et al., 2009). Although the first author's cultural and personal connection to the research setting helped deepen the understanding of participants' experiences, the researchers acknowledged its possible influence on the research process. Therefore, reflexive journaling and code-checking were employed during the analysis to minimise potential biases. The researchers checked the data analysis more than once and discussed the names of the themes with an expert who conducted qualitative research. Afterward, for a holistic evaluation, the entire manuscript was sent to three different experts, and the findings were organized in line with the expert suggestions.

2.5. *Ethical Considerations*

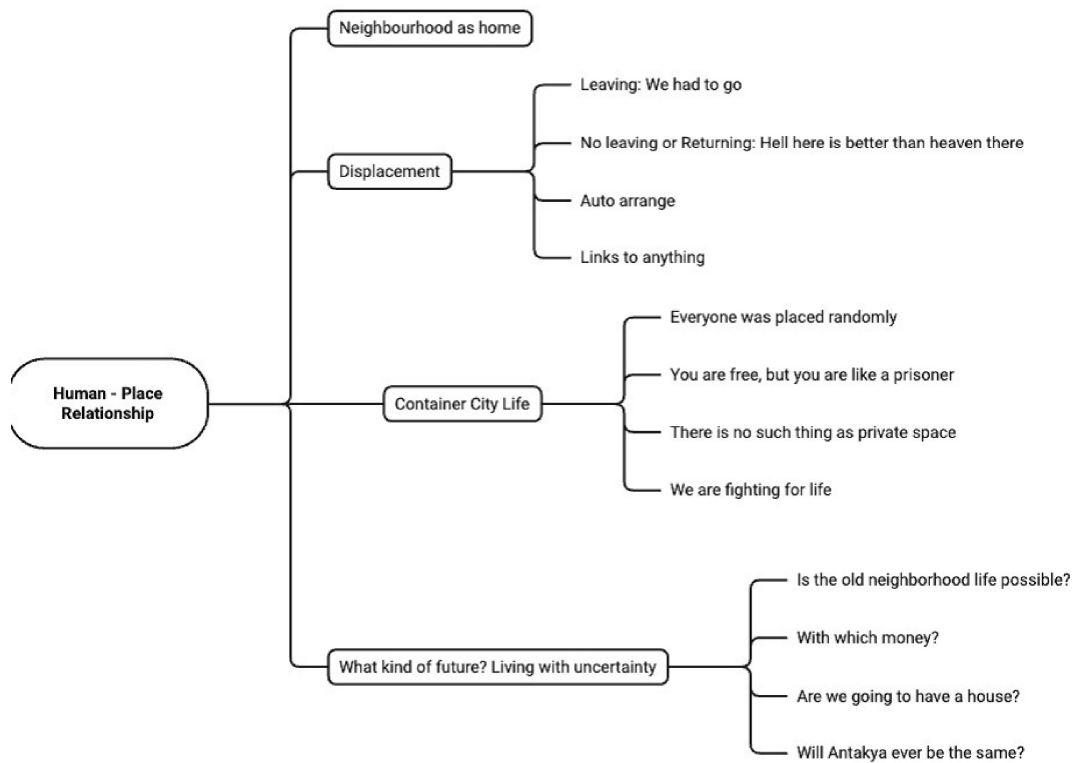
The study was approved by the Toros University Scientific Research Ethics Committee (reference number: 22.01.2025/09) in Turkey. Participants' verbal and written informed consent was obtained before the interviews were conducted. To protect the participants' confidentiality, we removed information deemed important

in the quotations and coded each participant using the letters “C” (the first letter of the case) and a number.

3. Findings

On the basis of the data analysis results, we categorized participants’ experiences and opinions into four themes and eleven subthemes (see Figure 1 & Table 3). Participant quotes related to these themes can be found in Supplementary Material 1.

Figure 1. Themes and subthemes



Source: Own study

3.1. Neighbourhood as home

When describing their lives before the earthquake, the participants focused on their own homes and neighborhood life. They used the concepts of “*being together*” (C6, C10), “*being peaceful*”(C1), “*having order*”(C7), and “*arranging according to themselves*”(C1, C7) regarding their own homes, while they defined neighborhood

life with the expressions “*we were like a family with the neighbors/neighborhood*” (C8, C 7, C 9, C10) and “*children could go out on the streets safely*” (C 2).

The participants mentioned their homes in relation to their extended families and neighbors and their neighborhoods in relation to family. These accounts suggest that, before the earthquake, the neighborhood functioned as an extension of home, providing a sense of familiarity, social closeness, and everyday security. These definitions also encompass feelings of trust and attachment to place.

3.2. Displacement

3.2.1. Leaving: “We had to go”

The participants stated that they had to leave Antakya for compelling reasons, which included *access to basic food* (C2), *health services* (C7), *security concerns* (C2), and *housing problems* (C2, C4, C6). The duration of the participants’ stay in different cities and countries (e.g., Qatar and Canada) varied between one month and one year. They stated that leaving Antakya made them “*sad*” and “*offended*” (C1-C10).

The participants’ excerpts frequently mentioned the phrase “forced displacement” and the sadness caused by leaving in this way. These expressions may be a reflection of the participants’ forced departure from their places of attachment, having left the city in that condition, and the feelings of guilt about those left behind.

3.2.2. No leaving or Returning: “Hell here is better than heaven there”

Some participants reported that they could not leave Antakya despite having the opportunity to do so (C2, C5, C9), whereas others temporarily left the city. Those who returned explained their decision to come back by citing reasons such as “*not being able to leave their hometown*” (e.g., C2, C4, C10), “*homesickness*” (e.g., C2, C6, C7), “*being in a foreign place*” (e.g., C7, C8), , and “*not being able to adapt*” to the participants emphasized sociocultural differences even when they went to places where they could feel ethnically or religiously similar. They also stated that even though they were provided with help and good conditions while they were outside Antakya, they “*could not make it there*” (e.g., C2, C4, C6, c8).

The participants emphasized statements reflecting a *strong sense of place attachment/identity* and *feelings of alienation, rootlessness, and loneliness* caused by forced displacement. These feelings appeared to have influenced the participants’ decision to return.

Ultimately, returning to Antakya may have given them a sense of identity related to the collective trauma and a sense of belonging through the familiarity of the surviving spaces. It also meant that they were able to visit their old neighbors, albeit in different locations (C6, C7, C8, C10). Thus, returning signified the reestablishment of remaining ties to their past life. Reestablishing these connections may have supported the participants’ well-being by alleviating their feelings of loneliness and rootlessness.

3.3. Container City Life

3.3.1. Everyone was placed randomly

Those who survived stated that they were placed in container cities, separated from their relatives and neighbors. Most participants described the difficulties experienced because they were placed randomly together with people they did not know and had different sociocultural characteristics. The most common expressions about this resettlement were “*I do not know anyone*” (e.g., C1, C4), “*I do not trust anyone*” (e.g., C4, C5, C6, C9, C10), “*neighborliness is not as before*” (e.g., C1, C3), “*feeling alienated*” (e.g., C3, C6), and “*falling among these people*” (e.g. C3).

These accounts reflect not only the discomfort and insecurity participants felt about living alongside strangers but also the loss of the sense of familiarity and trust provided by their previous neighborhood relationships. In the container city, fights and injuries among residents appeared to reinforce the participants’ sense of insecurity. Thus, participants experienced random placement not merely as a physical relocation, but as being severed from the social environment in which they had felt a sense of belonging and safety.

3.3.2. It would be good to be with old neighbors

Most participants stated that being together with their old neighbors would make them feel safer and better. Those who agreed with the statement “Being with former neighbours would be good for me” (e.g., C2, C7, C9) described the emotional significance of encountering familiar faces, using phrases such as “Seeing a familiar face from your past life makes you very happy” (C6), and “I wouldn’t feel alone” (C7). These accounts reflect the notion that a relocation plan which considers former neighbourhoods and neighbourly relationships could facilitate access to social support and strengthen participants’ sense of continuity in their lives.

3.3.3. “You are free, but you are like a prisoner”

Two years after the earthquake, the participants were still living in containers designed as temporary housing. The containers, described by almost all of the participants as “21 square meters” (e.g., C2, C5, C7), are places where they “cannot fit anything” (e.g., C4, C9, C10), “cannot host guests” (e.g., C1-C7), and “everything is limited” (e.g., C1, C2). The physical inadequacy of the space, coupled with family members living in different locations, led to “families are scattered” (e.g., C3, C7). In this context, they described container life as they “just trying to survive” (e.g., C1, C3, C5). One participant’s statement, “You’re free, but you’re like a prisoner” (C1), reflected the contradiction between the freedom to move outside the container and the necessity of remaining within the confining living space.

3.3.4. There is no such thing as private space

The proximity of the containers and the inadequate sound insulation appeared to cause privacy issues for the participants. These issues included hearing profanity, private conversations, and sounds coming from the bathroom. Participants noted

that those living in other containers could “*hear everything*,” which resulted in a lack of “*private space*.” Consequently, when noise occurs, neighbors come and knock on the door, leading to arguments (C3, C4, C5).

3.3.5. *We are fighting for life*

The participants mentioned power cuts, flooding during rain due to infrastructure-related problems, sewage backups due to sewerage structure, a lack of trees, a lack of social areas and schools, and noise problems due to the way containers are placed (e.g., C2, C7, C8, C9). These accounts reflect the fact that residents face numerous environmental and structural challenges as they go about their daily lives in container cities.

3.4. *What kind of future? Living with uncertainty*

3.4.1. *Is the old neighborhood life possible?*

Most participants emphasized their former neighborhood relationships and stated that they would prefer to live in their old neighborhoods if possible. They highlighted the uncertainty of the social environment in newly built housing and the difficulty of establishing neighborhood relationships from scratch (e.g., C2, C6, & C9). These accounts demonstrate that participants evaluate their future lives not merely in terms of owning a new home or apartment; they also consider maintaining a familiar social environment and a sense of belonging to the neighborhood. This reflects their need to reestablish relational and spatial continuity.

3.4.2. *With which money?*

Some participants said that rebuilding their homes or buying a new home was not feasible for economic reasons, whereas others said that they could not afford to pay the economic value of state-built housing. Another issue is that the condition of former tenants remains unclear (C5, C6, & C9). The accounts reflect the decisive role of economic conditions in the participants’ process of rebuilding their lives.

3.4.3. *Are we going to have a house?*

Two participants expressed their uncertainty about whether they would be able to own a home (apartment) in the future, along with the feelings of hopelessness accompanying this uncertainty (C1, C8). In this context, homeownership emerged as a symbol of the participants’ ability to reestablish order and achieve a predictable, secure life.

3.4.3. *Will Antakya ever be the same?*

While some participants expressed their longing for the reconstruction of Antakya and the restoration of their former lives, they also reflected their despair regarding this process through statements such as “Antakya will ever be the same again” and “I have no hope.” (C5, C9, & C10).

Table 3. Distribution of participants across themes and sub-themes

Theme	Subtheme	Illustrative participants	n
1. Neighborhood as home	—	C1, C2, C5, C6, C7, C8, C9, C10	8
2. Displacement	2.1. Leaving: “We had to go”	C2, C4, C6, C7, C8, C10	6
	2.2. No leaving or Returning: “Hell here is better than heaven there” – Not being able to leave Antakya	C2, C5, C9	3
	2.2. No leaving or Returning: “Hell here is better than heaven there” – Temporarily leaving Antakya	C2, C4, C6, C7, C8, C10	6
	2.2. No leaving or Returning: “Hell here is better than heaven there” – Returning to Antakya	C6, C7, C8, C10	4
3. Container city life	3.1. Everyone was placed randomly. – Alienation and insecurity	C1, C3, C4, C6, C9, C10	6
	3.1. Everyone was placed randomly. – Experiences that embody insecurity	C4, C5, C9	3
	3.2. It would be good to be with old neighbors	C2, C5, C6, C7, C8, C9, C10	7
	3.3. “You are free, but you are like a prisoner”	C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C7, C9, C10	8
	3.4. There is no such thing as private space.	C3, C4, C5, C9	4
	3.5. We are fighting for life	C3, C4, C5, C6, C7, C8, C9	7
4. What kind of future: Living with uncertainty	4.1. Is the old neighborhood life possible?	C2, C6, C7, C9	4
	4.2. With which money?	C5, C6, C9	3
	4.3. Are we going to have a house?	C1, C8	2
	4.4. Will Antakya ever be the same?	C5, C9, C10	3

Source: Own study

4. Discussion

This study aims to explore the experiences and meanings of forced displacement, experiences and meanings of living in a container city and the views of survivors of the February 6 and February 20, 2023, earthquakes in Antakya (Hatay), a city in southern Turkey, on reconstruction and the future. The study was conducted in line with an interpretative phenomenological analysis that allows for a rich and comprehensive discussion based on an understanding of the relationship between people and place. The results of the analysis revealed four themes.

Neighborhood as home

The participants in this study focused on home and neighborhood life while evaluating their lives before the earthquake. Hence, they described their homes with the concepts of “*being together*”, “*being peaceful*”, “*having order*”, and “*arranging according to themselves*”, while they described their neighborhood life with the expressions “*we were like a family with the neighbors/people in the neighborhood*”, “*children could go out on the streets safely*”. Participants’ descriptions reveal that they view the neighbourhood as an extension of their home. Together, home and neighborhood appeared to constitute relational and emotional spaces shaped by familiarity, everyday security, and a sense of community. These evaluations are in line with other study results indicating that the places that individuals feel connected to and that express as part of their identities are described in relation to security, comfort and positive emotions (Knez et al., 2018a; Masterson et al., 2017; Shorting et al., 2024). In this regard, the participants of this study seem to have a strong sense of place before the earthquake, which was an important component of their identity.

Displacement

We found that the participants left Antakya for periods ranging from one month to one year because of difficulties in accessing basic food and health services, security concerns, and housing problems. All the participants who left the city stated that they were forced to relocate, and this necessity made them sad and offended. The participants’ emotions reflect their feelings of sadness, grief, and mourning related to the loss of the place they see as part of their identity (Albrecht et al., 2007; Carroll et al., 2009; Cosh et al., 2024; Knez & Eliasson, 2017; Knez et al., 2018a). In addition, the problems that led the participants to relocate (Ural et al., 2024) parallel the problems and difficulties experienced by women whose houses were damaged and who had to live in tents and cars or other shelters one month after the February 6 Kahramanmaraş earthquake.

The reasons why participants who did not leave the city chose to stay, along with the emotions associated with that decision, and the ways in which participants who did leave the city described their experiences during the relocation process, demonstrate that both groups feel a strong attachment to Antakya. Therefore, all

of the relocated participants, including those who were assisted or provided with good conditions while they were outside Antakya, experienced feelings of alienation, rootlessness, loneliness, and longing in the place of relocation. Despite relocation and globalization processes, places remain strong objects of attachment for people (Lewicka, 2011). Individuals feel connected to their place of residence through its psychosocial qualities—including home, neighborhood, and city—and this place forms part of their identity (Case, 1996; Carroll et al., 2009; Knez et al., 2018a; Lengen et al., 2019; Meagher et al., 2024; Scannell & Gifford, 2017). Ultimately, people are motivated to stay close to the places they value and may experience intense anxiety when they are forced to leave these places (Meagher et al., 2024). Such displacement from places that have meaning for the individual could lead to a loss in the integrity of the self and the development of a sense of rootlessness (Oldfield & Stevenson, 2024). We found that the feelings of alienation, rootlessness, and loneliness caused by forced displacement were effective in their decision to return. We also found that returning to Antakya provided a sense of identity related to collective trauma, a sense of belonging through the familiarity of the surviving places, and the opportunity to visit old neighbors, albeit in different places. These findings constitute important components in reducing survivors' feelings of loneliness and rootlessness and in promoting recovery and well-being.

Container city life

Owing to the random placement in container cities, participants lived in cities with people who differed from their relatives and/or neighbors before the earthquake, people they did not know, and people with different sociocultural dynamics. This type of placement deprived participants of the social support resources necessary to cope with exposure to earthquakes and various losses. This problem of access to social support, which was experienced by all participants in the first period, persists for some participants. In addition, not all participants reported feeling secure. This feeling of insecurity is reinforced by the problems experienced among container city residents, ranging from arguments and fights to injuries. However, receiving social support and feeling safe are essential components of survivors' psychological well-being. After all, together with various psychological problems, communities exposed to earthquakes face permanent vulnerability, and psychological recovery has a long-term nature (Çınaroğlu et al., 2024, preprint). In this respect, cooperation is one of the priorities in the recovery process (Doğruel, 2024). Resilience processes such as receiving social support are critical for survivors (Kocyigit et al., 2024; Ni et al., 2020). Resilience depends on the context of the dynamic and reciprocal relationships between the individual and the place (Matheson et al., 2020; Ni et al., 2020). This context includes the physical aspects of the place and the social and cultural processes on which social/collective identity resources are based (Knez et al., 2028a; Oldfield & Stevenson, 2024; Peng et al., 2020; Qamar, 2023). Collective identity resources have a buffering effect on posttraumatic stress, which may

be caused by an earthquake (Muldoon et al., 2017). After a major environmental disaster, residents who believe that they live in a community where neighbors help each other are more likely to see their community as a recovering one (Bergstrand & Mayer, 2020). In this respect, as indicated by the participants in this study, settling in a container city with a place-based approach that considers pre-earthquake social ties (such as settling with pre-earthquake neighbors) could provide a source of support and confidence in the face of difficulties.

The container, which all participants defined as “a 21-square meter place”, is a place where “everything is limited” from cooking facilities to the belongings they own, where “life is handled”, where they experience the dilemma of being “free and prisoner” and do not see it as a “house/home” compared to their previous lives. In addition, this limitation causes family members to travel to different places, and residents cannot host guests. These spaces are related to the state of boredom that some participants described as “we feel constricted in them”. Owing to the proximity of the containers, the participants stated that they “can hear everything” and “there is no such thing as private space”. With these aspects, the container is far from what a home offers psychologically, including privacy, self-expression, and a sense of personal identity (Meagher et al., 2024). This situation also seems to cause difficulties in maintaining family cohesion, which is an important component of the recovery process (Ni et al., 2020).

Home is defined as the neighborhood/region in which one lives (Case, 1996; Meagher et al., 2024). Owing to the physical design of the container city, which is not suitable for providing the necessary space for privacy, and the social fabric created because of the random placement of the survivors, the participants considered themselves “falling among these people”. In this respect, this negative emotional connection with the container as a home may cause individuals to feel more stressed and depressed (Meagher et al., 2024; Saxbe & Repetti, 2010).

Although containers are offered as a universal solution in crises such as earthquakes or other natural disasters, they also present many problems (Bashawri et al., 2014; Félix et al., 2013; Peternel & Podjed, 2024). Containers and container city life have various problems, including heating and cooling containers because of power cuts, water cuts, flooding during rains, sewage overflow, noise due to the close placement of containers, and limited social spaces. All these challenges cause participants to “fight for their lives”. These challenges and random placement may lower individuals’ tolerance levels, causing them to feel more stress and exhibit stressful behaviors. There is a large body of literature on the relationship between the physical and social aspects of the environments where people live and their mental health and well-being. Examples of variables in this relationship include how space is perceived, accessible social-emotional networks related to health protection and maintenance, and the ability to produce material resources and tools (Duff, 2012; Knez & Eliasson, 2017; McKenzie et al., 2025; Saxbe & Repetti, 2010; Wiles et al.,

2017). In this respect, the recovery processes of survivors who experienced the devastating effects of the earthquake cannot be considered independent of where they lived (Qamar, 2023; Stroink, 2020). Therefore, it is important to consider geographical conditions in the construction of the physical infrastructure of container cities. It also seems that it is necessary to design container cities in a way that will provide optimal social interaction and physical activity and create opportunities for various pursuits.

What kind of future: Living with uncertainty

Participants are uncertain about how the TOKİ housing will be located, how they will be able to pay for the installments of the new housing or find rental housing, and what kind of construction process Antakya will undergo.

Together with the vulnerability brought about by the multidimensional effects of the earthquake, the reconstruction process, which is not based on a participatory and inclusive understanding, leads to increased uncertainty and misinformation, which causes survivors to be disappointed and weakens their trust in reconstruction processes (Aydin et al., 2025). Those who had forced displacement and relocation may have evaluated their previous living spaces better than they did in areas where they settled after construction (Kamacı-Karahan & Kemeç, 2022), yet experiences with housing design after past earthquakes have shown that it is highly important to consider place-based lifestyles and cultural elements in this process (Aydin et al., 2025). Almost all the participants in this study stated that they would like to live in their old neighborhoods or with their old neighbors as beneficiaries during the construction process. They also stated their worries about what kind of settlement they would have in the new construction. In this regard, the results of this study seem to show the importance of considering sociocultural components in the reconstruction process as well as the importance of a reconstruction approach that includes beneficiaries because these components are more influential on place attachment than the labor market is (Trąbka et al., 2022) and are related to survivors' satisfaction levels with the permanent housing they are placed in after the disaster (Kamacı-Karahan & Kemeç, 2022). A noninclusive understanding of reconstruction that does not consider sociocultural processes could result in survivors feeling alienated and homeless, experiencing family problems, not being able to maintain their life routines, and leaving that place (Carroll et al., 2009).

The vulnerability faced by survivors requires a long recovery process (Çınaroğlu et al., 2024, preprint). Individual, social, institutional, and ecological resources should be utilized to cope with the stress and threats caused by problems and vulnerability (Stroink, 2020). Economic income is an important component of the recovery of survivors from disasters and catastrophes (Ni et al., 2020). On the other hand, when we consider the wide and multidimensional effects of disasters, strategies based on the social dimensions of resilience and the spatial dimensions of social capital should be followed in the postdisaster process (Panday et al., 2021; Qamar, 2023). In

this context, it is important to consider both the proximity of the reconstruction to the old place of the beneficiaries and the old neighborhood life of the beneficiaries in the resettlement area. The reconstruction of Antakya's symbolic sites should be considered part of this process (Aydin et al., 2025; Kamacı-Karahan & Kemeç, 2022). Such understanding contributes to individual and societal recovery and well-being by preserving and sustaining place-based collective identity and ties (Doğruel, 2024; Muldoon et al., 2017; Farny & Dentoni, 2025).

Theoretical and practical implications

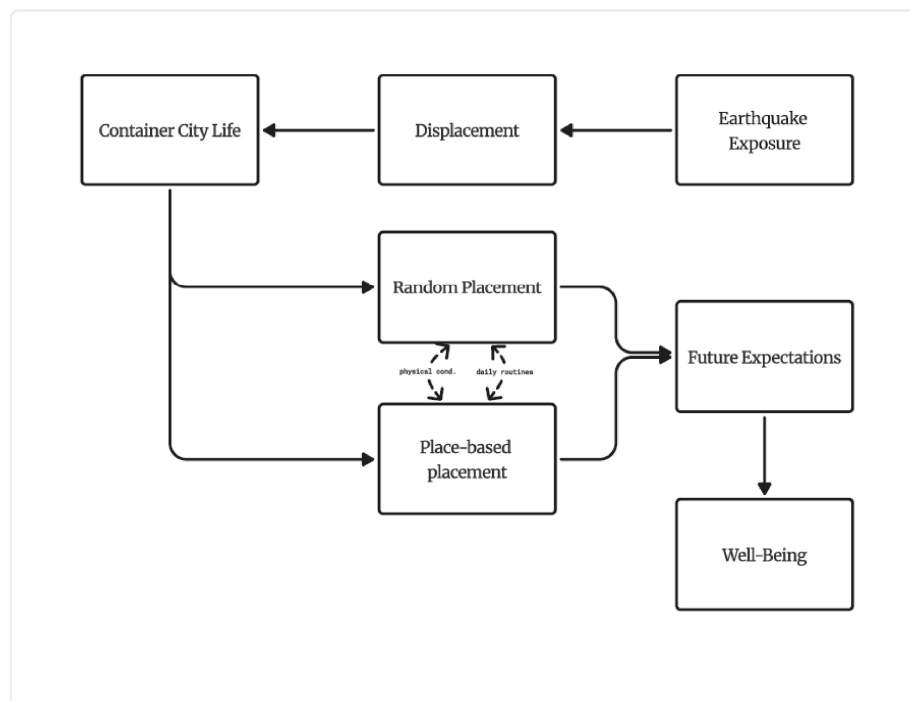
According to the findings, displacement may be associated with psychological reactions such as insecurity, alienation, and anxiety among survivors (Knez et al., 2018a; Knez et al., 2018b). The random placement of survivors in container cities can also increase feelings of insecurity and limit access to social support networks. In the context of post-disaster crisis management, the results revealed that security should not be understood solely as physical protection from danger. Accordingly, survivors' perceived sense of security includes access to familiar social support networks linked to the continuity of place identity, stable daily routines, the maintenance of family bonds, social support, and reduced uncertainty about the future (Asadi et al., 2026; Herman, 2015; Oldfield & Stevenson, 2024; Usluoğlu & Atılğan, 2025).

According to the theoretical framework of place identity and socio-ecological resilience, understanding the wide and multidimensional impacts caused by disasters and catastrophic events and realizing interventions for these impacts should be realized based on the human-place relationship. In this context, organizing settlement processes for both temporary and permanent housing in a way that preserves the pre-disaster social structure can contribute to survivors' ability to maintain accessible social support resources (Usluoğlu & Atılğan, 2025), which can pave the way for a natural process based on social capital that includes psychological resilience and well-being components, for survivors. The restoration or reconstruction of historically significant areas is also among the fundamental requirements emerging in this process. In this context, conducting intervention and reconstruction processes in a manner that takes the identity of space into account is crucial for rebuilding survivors' sense of ontological security and supporting a sustainable psychological resilience process (Asadi et al., 2026; Basu & Hettiarachchi, 2025; Knez et al., 2018a; Knez et al., 2018b; Prayag et al., 2021; Sobhaninia et al., 2023). Therefore, intervention and reconstruction processes should be carried out through an inclusive and context-sensitive collaboration involving various stakeholders, particularly local governments and local organizations (Aydin et al., 2025; Pasta et al., 2025).

Based on the results of the study and its theoretical framework, this research proposes a place-based conceptual model that incorporates contextual and

experiential factors that are potentially associated with psychosocial well-being following an earthquake (see Figure 2). Accordingly, random placement, poor living conditions, disrupted daily routines and uncertainty about the future are considered to be processes that may undermine psychosocial well-being. Conversely, place-based placement is presented as an approach that can foster survivors' continuity of place identity and sense of control. This provides access to familiar social networks, reinstating daily routines and implementing participatory practices that foster a sense of predictability about the future. It is anticipated that these processes may also enhance psychosocial well-being. The proposed model offers a conceptual explanation derived from qualitative findings and a theoretical framework, rather than a validated causal structure. It is recommended that the model's proposed relationships be tested in future quantitative, longitudinal and, mixed-methods studies, and that its potential to inform post-disaster resettlement and psychosocial intervention planning be evaluated through applied research.

Figure 2. Post-Earthquake Place-Based Well-Being Model



Source: Own study

Limitations and further research

The cross-sectional nature and small sample size of the study include several limitations. The cross-sectional design of the study may influence how participants recall and evaluate their past experiences. Furthermore, the generalizability of the findings is limited because changes over time cannot be tracked, and the sample size is limited. Researchers could further validate the results by using a longitudinal design and/or data triangulation with multiple data sources to address the changing reactions of survivors in the process.

Conclusion

The results of the study may contribute to the development of place-based individual and social-psychological resilience that will buffer the effects of trauma after a disaster and to the monitoring of strategies that can contribute to the restoration of well-being.

Statements and declarations

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. The authors declare that they have nothing to disclose.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process: ChatGPT (GPT-4o, July 2025, OpenAI) and DeepL Translator (<https://www.deepl.com/en/translator>) were used solely to enhance the linguistic quality of this manuscript. ChatGPT supported improvements in fluency, coherence, and grammar, while DeepL was used to cross-check complex English phrasing. Neither tool was used to generate original content, research ideas, or data analysis. All conceptual content, data interpretation, and scholarly arguments were developed entirely by the author. The manuscript was thoroughly reviewed and edited by the author to ensure accuracy, originality, and adherence to ethical research standards. The author takes full responsibility for the final version.

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