Strengthening Pre-Crisis Communication in Türkiye's Disaster Management System: Challenges and Institutional Practices

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the challenges encountered in pre-crisis communication within disaster management in Türkiye and to propose potential solutions. The research first includes a comprehensive literature review to identify theoretical perspectives and best practices related to pre-crisis communication. Following this, interviews with field experts were conducted to obtain in-depth insights into institutional strategies, existing challenges, and opportunities for improvement. Based on the findings from the literature and interviews, the study will proceed with a survey to further broaden and validate the results.

Disaster management consists of four phases: preparedness, response, rescue, and recovery. Pre-crisis communication plays a critical role from the very beginning of this cycle. Considering the high levels of uncertainty that emerge during and after disasters, minimizing this uncertainty for affected individuals is essential. Within this study, the pre-crisis communication activities of AFAD (Disaster and Emergency Management Authority), Türkiye's primary public authority on disasters, as well as two experienced non-governmental organizations—KIZILAY (Turkish Red Crescent) and AKUT (Search and Rescue Association)—were examined.

AFAD integrates pre-crisis communication into the "preparedness" and "risk reduction" phases of the disaster management cycle. Plans such as TAMP (Türkiye Disaster Response Plan), TARAP (Türkiye Risk Reduction Plan), and İRAP (Provincial Risk Reduction Plan) outline inter-agency responsibilities, communication infrastructure, and standard operating procedures. Disaster scenarios are created using AFAD-RED (Earthquake Damage and Loss Estimation Software) to develop pre-planned messaging and information strategies based on worst-case projections. Drills are used to test these processes, identify shortcomings, and ensure accurate messaging during crises. AFAD's mobile application, "AFAD Emergency," also contributes to pre-crisis awareness by providing information such as assembly areas, training videos, and location-sharing functions.

KIZILAY manages pre-disaster inventory and resource coordination through its KIZILAY Disaster Management System (KAYS), but its direct public communication efforts prior to crises remain limited. Its pre-crisis communication activities mainly involve disaster and climate awareness programs in schools, volunteer networks, and informational efforts targeting blood donors and families, particularly through student-focused initiatives.

Interviews with experts revealed that disaster-focused mobile applications attract significant attention during disasters but decline in usage afterward. Therefore, increasing the effectiveness of these technological tools in pre-crisis communication requires enhanced training, sustained engagement, and improved promotional strategies. One example of AFAD's awareness-building efforts is the Family Disaster Plan, which aims to reduce uncertainty by clarifying each family's communication, assembly procedures, and strategies for contacting relatives in the event of a disaster.

Strengthening public awareness through improvements in institutional communication strategies, the promotion of disaster plans, digital systems/applications, and training programs will facilitate more effective disaster response and contribute to the overall efficiency of the disaster management cycle.

Keywords: disaster management, crisis communication, institutions, Turkiye