

## Letter to Editor

# The Use of Fear Appeal to Promote Safe Behaviors Among People in the Event of an Earthquake



MoradAli Zareipour<sup>1\*</sup> 

1. Department of Public Health, Faculty of Health, Khoy University of Medical Sciences, Khoy, Iran.



**Citation** Zareipour M. The Use of Fear Appeal to Promote Safe Behaviors Among People in the Event of an Earthquake. *Health in Emergencies and Disasters Quarterly*. 2023; 9(1):5-6. <http://dx.doi.org/10.32598/hdq.8.4.544.1>

**doi:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.32598/hdq.8.4.544.1>

### Dear Editor

**E**arthquake, an unpredictable natural disaster, poses a significant threat to public health, causing physical, human, social, cultural, and economic damages [1]. Iran is among the world's top 10 earthquake-prone countries—remembering earthquakes cause the greatest human casualties. Preparedness and safe behavior before and during earthquakes are crucially important to reduce the damage of earthquakes and prevent life-threatening incidents and property damage [2]. Each year, unexpected events affect 200 million people, resulting in economic losses of up to 3% of the affected countries' GDP (gross domestic product). By observing safe behaviors during earthquakes, it is possible to reduce risks and prevent casualties and damages [3]. Thus, finding ways to change people's attitudes toward earthquake safety and steer them toward secure behaviors is one of the main concerns of crisis management officials in the country [4]. Communication and persuasion strategies effectively change attitudes and behaviors regarding earthquake safety [5].

One such strategy is using fear appeal, which induces people to change their behaviors by invoking fear. Fear appeal is a communication strategy aimed at arousing emotions in individuals to persuade them to engage in a specific behavior [6]. Using fear to gain attention and influence people is known as fear appeal. Although fear

appeal can quickly get your point across and affect others, its overuse can backfire by making society more confused and anxious [7]. The degree to which fear appeals to people varies and depends on several variables, including personality, community culture, prior exposure to earthquakes, personal experiences, and correct knowledge of earthquakes. However, in general, it is preferable to regularly educate people through trustworthy and authoritative sources so that they can act in a protected manner when an earthquake occurs. Fear appeal is defined as persuasive messages designed to scare individuals by describing unpleasant events that will happen to them if they do not follow the suggested message [5]. In fear appeal, people compare their perceptions of the risk with a criterion that judges how much risk is acceptable. If the perceived risk is higher than the acceptable risk, the individual is motivated to reduce the risk [6]. The relationship between risk level and fear appeal varies among individuals. In some cases, an increase in risk level may lead to a rise in fear appeal, while in other cases, individuals may experience less fear due to their knowledge and awareness of hazards and their ability to cope with them. This means that some individuals may be more susceptible to fear appeal, while others may be less due to their understanding of risks and skills in dealing with them. Therefore, it is important to consider individual differences when developing strategies to address risk and fear in a community.

.....  
**\* Corresponding Author:**

MoradAli Zareipour, Assistant Professor:

Address: Department of Public Health, Faculty of Health, Khoy University of Medical Sciences, Khoy, Iran.

E-mail: [z.morad@yahoo.com](mailto:z.morad@yahoo.com)

Hence, fear appeal can be used to promote safe behaviors during an earthquake. To succeed in creating fear appeal, accurate and effective information about earthquake risks and safety measures must be provided to people. On the other hand, to increase people's confidence in the face of earthquake hazards, safety measures and accurate information about earthquakes should always be available to them, and they should be familiar with this information. Additionally, providing sufficient details on earthquake prevention and response plans can create more peace of mind for the individual and prepare them to deal with earthquake hazards. A fear appeal can be one of the effective solutions for promoting safe behaviors during an earthquake. However, an individual should not be scared to the extent that they lose interest in safe actions. Safety measures should be made available to people to achieve this goal, and they should be taught how to act in the face of earthquake hazards.

Methods such as displaying images and videos of destroyed buildings and areas severely affected by earthquakes can create fear in individuals regarding earthquake hazards. A fear appeal can be created in individuals by showing the destruction of buildings and the widespread financial, spiritual, and psychological impacts of earthquakes on people's lives. Additionally, proper and timely information dissemination regarding earthquake hazards and safety measures can generate fear appeal in individuals. In this method, training courses on earthquake hazards and safety measures should be held, and educational films and commercials about earthquake hazards and safety measures should be broadcast to increase awareness among individuals in this regard.

However, to create fear in individuals regarding earthquake hazards, it is necessary to provide accurate and effective information about the dangers and safety measures and continuously renew them. Moreover, individuals should be given solutions for resisting earthquake hazards to better cope with an earthquake's hazards. Thus, a fear appeal can be one of the effective factors in promoting safe behaviors against earthquakes. However, multiple methods should be combined to improve safe behaviors against earthquakes, and individuals become familiar with earthquake hazards and safety measures.

## References

- [1] Zaremohzzabieh Z, Samah AA, Roslan S, Shaffril HAM, D'Silva JL, Kamarudin S, et al. Household preparedness for future earthquake disaster risk using an extended theory of planned behavior. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*. 2021; 65:102533. [DOI:10.1016/j.ijdr.2021.102533]
- [2] Seyed Mazhari M, Pishgooie SAH, Aliyari S. The effect of buddy aid education packages on the wives of military personnel awareness and attitude in the face with earth quake in 2013. *Military Caring Sciences Journal*. 2014;1(1):1-8
- [3] Moreno J. The role of communities in coping with natural disasters: Lessons from the 2010 Chile Earthquake and Tsunami. *Procedia Engineering*. 2018; 212:1040-5. [DOI:10.1016/j.proeng.2018.01.134]
- [4] Yari A, Zarezadeh Y, Ostadtaghizadeh A. Prevalence of fatalistic attitudes toward earthquake disaster risk management in citizens of Tehran, Iran. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*. 2019; 38:101181. [DOI:10.1016/j.ijdr.2019.101181]
- [5] Bigsby E, Albarracín D. Self-and response efficacy information in fear appeals: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Communication*. 2022; 72(2):241-63. [DOI:10.1093/joc/jqab048]
- [6] Moussaoui LS, Claxton N, Desrichard O. Fear appeals to promote better health behaviors: An investigation of potential mediators. *Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine*. 2021; 9(1):600-18. [DOI:10.1080/21642850.2021.1947290] [PMID] [PMCID]
- [7] Stollow JA, Moses LM, Lederer AM, Carter R. How fear appeal approaches in COVID-19 health communication may be harming the global community. *Health Education & Behavior*. 2020; 47(4):531-5. [DOI:10.1177/1090198120935073] [PMID]