

**TURKISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION  
HEALTH EFFECTS OF RIOT CONTROL  
AGENTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS  
VIOLATIONS: AN ASSESSMENT FOR  
THE MARCH 2025 PERIOD**

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**TÜRK  
TABİPLERİ  
BİRLİĞİ**

## **Turkish Medical Association**

### **Health Effects of Crowd Control Agents and Human Rights Violations: An Assessment for the March 2025 Period**

#### **Introduction**

In March 2025, the dismissals of local government officials in Turkey caused a wide public outcry and were met with widespread mass protests. Following the dismissal of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu on March 19, 2025, protest demonstrations spread throughout the country. According to the Ministry of Interior, approximately 2,000 people were detained nationwide, and over 300 individuals were arrested.

Freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly are guaranteed by Article 34 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, as well as by international law. Despite this, both media reports and field observations by various non-governmental organizations indicate that law enforcement heavily used crowd control agents—commonly known as "pepper spray" and plastic bullets—during these demonstrations. Significant efforts are underway worldwide to ban tear-inducing chemicals, with commonly used agents including Chlorobenzylidenmalononitrile (CS), Chloroacetophenone (CN), and Oleoresin Capsicum (OC). Although these substances are referred to as "gas," they are practically used in liquid forms, and since they are not water-soluble, their adverse effects are difficult to manage. Images and testimonies from the events show that chemical agents were used to target demonstrators, even in a manner that could be classified as 'chemical weapons' according to the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which Turkey is also a signatory. This practice, which violates fundamental human rights, can also lead to severe, permanent, and even fatal health problems. The Turkish Medical Association aims to reach individuals affected by crowd control agents during this period, to make visible the health problems experienced, and to warn authorities about these practices which have very severe health consequences.

#### **Method**

A questionnaire was developed to assess how the health of those exposed to crowd control agents was affected. The questionnaire was published on the TTB (Turkish Medical Association) website between April 2-10, 2025, and announced on social media platforms. Participants' identification information was not collected, and a security system was created to prevent access to their IP addresses. The questionnaire was viewed 10,274 times. 2,165 people completed the form, while 8,113 people exited the page without completing it. The questionnaire included an open-ended section where participants could add any additional comments. The most striking of these experiences are presented in *italics* under the relevant headings. Although it is not possible to generalize the collected data to all demonstrators exposed nationwide, both the high number of participants and the extremely important information shared indicate the value of sharing this study with the public and authorities.

#### **Findings**

The average age of participants is 23.54 years (Standard deviation 5.71).

**Table 1. Distribution of Participants by Gender**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Female	1,237	57.1
Male	897	41.4
Nonbinary	26	1.2
Prefer not to specify	5	0.2

57.1% of participants were female, 41.4% male, 1.2% non-binary, and 0.2% preferred not to specify their gender.

Table 2 presents the distribution of participants in the study by the provinces where they were affected by agents used by the police during demonstrations. 56.1% of participants were from Istanbul, 32.8% from Ankara, and 6.7% from Izmir.

**Table 2. Distribution of participants by provinces where they were affected by agents used by the police in demonstrations**

<b>Province</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Istanbul	1,215	56.1
Ankara	711	32.8
Izmir	145	6.7
Eskişehir	31	1.4
Antalya	29	1.3
Unknown	10	0.5
Adana	9	0.4
Kocaeli	9	0.4
Aydın	1	0.0
Denizli	1	0.0
Diyarbakır	1	0.0
Hatay	1	0.0
İçel	1	0.0
Kayseri	1	0.0

Table 3 shows how many times participants were exposed to chemical agents.

**Table 3. Number of times participants were exposed to chemical agents used by the police**

Number of exposures	Number	Percentage
Once	340	15.7
More than once	1,819	84.2
No answer	2	0.1
Total	2,161	100.0

84.2% of respondents were exposed to chemical agents more than once.

*"We were targeted twice with gas canisters and repeatedly with pepper spray/tear gas, aimed at the press. It was directly applied to press workers."*

*"They fired dozens of those green and yellow gas canisters one after another; there was no air left to breathe, and that day when one of the canisters fell in front of me, both my friend and I thought we were going to die."*

Participants in the study were exposed to chemical agents for an average of 5.5 hours. 10.9% of participants stated they were exposed for 1 hour, 14.5% for 2 hours, 15.6% for 3 hours, and 12.0% for 4 hours. Participants were asked about their duration of exposure to chemical agents. This data is naturally based on self-reporting rather than measurement. Data on the duration of exposure to chemical agents is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. Distribution of participants by duration of exposure to chemical agents** The average exposure time for individuals exposed for one hour or longer is 5.6 hours.

Duration	Number	Percentage
≤1 hour	398	18.3
2–9 hours	1,387	63.9
≥10 hours	396	18.0
Unknown	14	0.6

Data on the closest distance from which chemical agents were effective are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5. Closest distance from which chemical agents were effective**

Answer	Number	Percentage
Less than 1 meter	882	40.8
1-5 meters	875	40.5
More than 5 meters	401	18.6
No answer	3	0.1
Total	2,161	100.0

Chemical agents were applied to demonstrators from very close distances. 81.3% of respondents were exposed to chemical agents at a distance of less than five meters.

Respondents' testimonies express more than just numbers:

*"I was exposed to pepper gas from 15-20 cm away, but it wasn't like the pepper gas my friends were exposed to; a different gas was used that caused lasting skin redness, permeated clothing, and didn't come off the skin even after a shower. Location Saraçhane."*

*"I received three or four baton blows to my head forcefully, and at the same time, chemicals were sprayed at my face from a close distance."*

*"I experienced shortness of breath and loss of consciousness due to the gas canister. On March 21st, in front of the municipality building, a gas capsule first hit my stomach (it caused no damage due to my jacket), and as soon as I lifted my head, a gas capsule hit just below my eye, above my cheekbone."*

*"When I was hit in the hand by small gas capsules, commonly known as plastic bullets (from five meters away), I didn't notice at that moment because I was being subjected to police torture, but the swelling in the joint connecting my left hand's ring finger to my hand subsided three days later, the pain five days later, and the wound 11 days later."*

*"While I was at the back of the crowd, I was hit in the temple area with what is called a plastic bullet, which was like a ball containing pepper spray powder. I suppose it was supposed to be fired at the ground, but even though I was at the very front, I was directly aimed at and hit in the head from a long distance."*

Data regarding the contact duration at the closest distance of exposure to chemical agents are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6. Contact duration at the closest distance of exposure to chemical agents**

**Contact duration Number Percentage**

Less than 1 min	558	25.8
1-5 minutes	1,005	46.5
6-10 minutes	289	13.4
More than 10 min	304	14.1
No answer	5	0.2
Total	2,161	100.0

The contact duration at the closest distance of exposure to chemical agents is predominantly less than 10 minutes.

Self-reported data regarding the level of impact from chemical agents on respondents are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7. Level of impact from chemical agents**

**Level of impact Number Percentage**

Severely affected	1,302	60.3
Slightly affected	846	39.1
Not affected	8	0.4
No answer	5	0.2
Total	2,161	100.0

Those who reported being severely affected by chemical agents constitute 60.3% of the respondents.

*"I was affected by intense gas that came from a metal capsule, not the contents of what we call a plastic bullet (they fired it on the ODTÜ campus). For the first few minutes, I could barely breathe, and for 10-15 minutes afterward, I had serious trouble breathing. We called an ambulance for friends who were more severely affected, and some fainted. I definitely think its use, especially on people defending their constitutional rights, is an act of barbarism."*

*"After the gas capsule was fired, a white powder spread. I waved my hand to wipe it off my friend's jacket so it wouldn't stay on him, and suddenly I went into a coughing fit. It was something much different from pepper gas. Also, on the day we were exposed to the gas and capsule, when we went home, my friend had put the t-shirt he used as a mask into his bag. Just by opening the bag, two other friends, who had not been exposed before, went into coughing fits, and I think another's allergies were triggered. We ventilated a large room for half an hour to get rid of the cough. Perhaps this helps in understanding the dosage."*

*"I mean, I had a slight cough before I was hit by the gas canister, but after being hit, my cough hasn't gone away for more than a week, and I still have coughing fits sometimes, especially at first. I was hit three times within an hour, and it wasn't normal gas; it was fired from the opposite side, 4-5 of them at once. The fired canisters both emitted a gunpowder smell, and each canister broke into several pieces, releasing gas from all of them."*

*"It's not considered an injury, but solid particles from the gas weapon went directly into my eye. Two days later, I had an eye tomography and a cornea test, and they stated there was no problem."*

Data on the use of protective materials against chemical agents are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8. Use of materials for protection against chemical agents**

Material Used	Number	Percentage
Simple masks (scarf, cloth, etc.)	1,417	78.9
Professional masks (medical mask, N95, etc.)	880	49.0
Goggles (safety goggles, swimming goggles, etc.)	557	31.0
Liquids (lemon, vinegar, milk, antacid, etc.)	1,279	71.2
Other	125	6.9

83.1% of respondents used some material to protect themselves from pepper spray. 78.9% of respondents used simple masks, scarves, or cloth materials; 49.0% used professional masks; 31.0% used safety goggles or swimming goggles; and 71.2% tried to counteract the burning effect of chemical agents with liquids such as lemon, vinegar, milk, or antacids.

*"The plastic bullet managed to break my safety goggles. I was wearing regular glasses inside, but if it hadn't been for the safety goggles, it probably would have gone into my eye."*

Symptoms that appeared after exposure to chemical agents are visualized using a word cloud technique in Figure 1 and presented in Table 9.







*"The effect of pepper gas sprayed into my left eye from a distance of 30 centimeters only lessened after 30 minutes, despite the antacid solutions and eye drops I applied to my eye and face for treatment. It took approximately 4 hours to completely subside."*

*"Pepper gas was intentionally sprayed into my left eye, and I felt I would lose my vision until I was taken to the ambulance. I couldn't open or use my eye."*

*"My vision remained blurry for so long that I thought it would never clear up again; I was very scared. The next day and that night, I used an antibiotic ointment for my eye, and it finally got better."*

*"After being hit by a plastic bullet 1-2 cm below my left eye on my face, I experienced memory loss and loss of balance for the first week. The gas canister that hit below my knee on my right leg scraped my bone and hit my groin, where it became embedded, causing a small depression."*

*"I was exposed to gas from a distance of less than one meter, directly aimed at my eye. For the next 24 hours, I felt a burning sensation in my hand. Additionally, the part of my face exposed to the gas remained swollen for about 24 hours."*

Additionally, skin burning sensation was reported by 48.8%, redness by 37.6%, skin pain by 28.6%, burns by 16.6%, rashes by 9.3%, and blistering by 2.7%.

*"After about a week of itching, burning, and nausea symptoms, I saw an emergency doctor who gave me a cream for the itching. After applying the cream, my body showed an allergic reaction, and despite using an allergic injection and anesthetic cream for 2 days, I am still burning. I documented it with photos."*

*"Visible burns appeared on my skin. Eczema-like conditions appeared all over my body. For nearly a week, I experienced very severe shortness of breath, and my voice was completely lost. Headaches, drowsiness, and brain fog were very high."*

*"On both nights of the two days I was affected by pepper gas, my hands burned severely. On one night, after showering, my scalp, hands, eyes, and penis burned severely."*

*"My hand and arm burned for days because of pepper gas. Also, I was 17 when I was exposed to chemical weapons, but now I'm 18."*

Furthermore;

dizziness was reported by 34.3%, distress by 19.8%, anxiety by 18.4%, balance disorder by 18.2%, irritability by 17.6%, concentration disorder by 15.3%, numbness by 9.9%, confusion/loss of consciousness by 7.1%, and agitation by 4.3%.

*"Because of the repeated use of sound bombs, I have extreme sensitivity to sound. Also, whenever I see/smell any smoke, I feel nauseous and get triggered."*

*"Hearing loss"*

*"Loss of balance, constant dizziness"*

*"I think this level of disproportionate force is a crime against humanity, and I am concerned about the possibility of experiencing permanent health problems."*

*"I'm experiencing shortness of breath. This also affects my sleep. I still wake up unable to breathe. My sleep has become irregular."*

*"I was exposed to pepper spray for the first time in my life, and since that day, my mind has been very cloudy; I can't even focus when talking to my friends."*

*"When I open and close my eyes, or when I get up from where I'm sitting, it's as if a flash has gone off in front of my eyes, and I physically feel this (like an electric shock) inside my head."*

Participants also stated that after gas exposure, they developed symptoms such as hypertension, slowed heart rate, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, and diarrhea.

*"Heart palpitations."*

*"Some people called what was thrown at us orange gas and acid. For a few days, I couldn't eat properly, and I started vomiting and having diarrhea. I am weak now, and my intestines are very weak."*

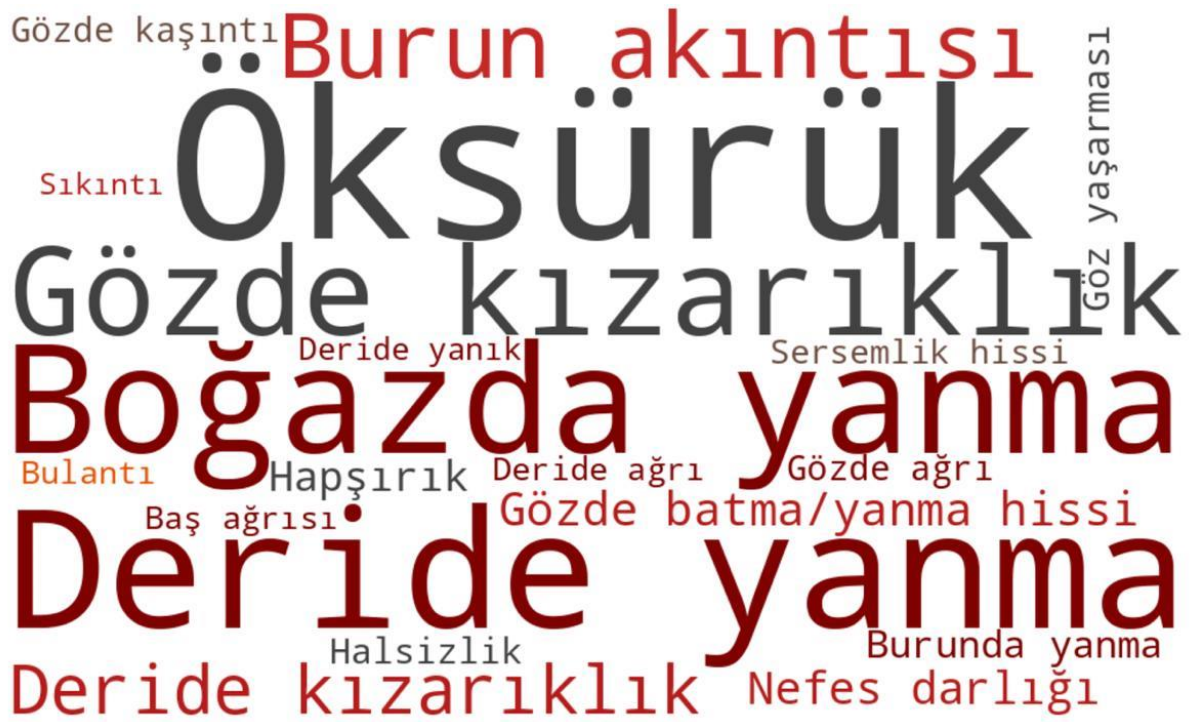
*"I also think it affected my menstrual cycle. My period was delayed, and my bleeding intensity decreased." "I vomited five times. My lungs ached for three days, and I was far behind."*

**Table 9. Symptoms appearing after exposure to chemical agents**

<b>Symptom</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Cough	1873	86.7
Throat burning	1536	71.1
Shortness of breath	1457	67.4
Watery eyes	1415	65.5
Runny nose	1316	60.9
Stinging/burning sensation in eye	1306	60.4
Eye redness	1248	57.8
Nose burning	1118	51.7
Skin burning sensation	1055	48.8
Sneezing	1004	46.5
Skin redness	813	37.6
Blurred vision	775	35.8
Dizziness	741	34.3
Nausea	723	33.5
Itchy eyes	678	31.4
Eye pain	652	30.2
Skin pain / soreness	619	28.6
Weakness	593	27.4
Difficulty swallowing	532	24.6

Headache	524	24.3
Distress	427	19.8
Increased salivation	408	18.8
Anxiety	398	18.4
Balance disorder	393	18.2
Irritability	380	17.6
Sweating	379	17.5
Eyelid burn	364	16.8
Skin burn	359	16.6
Increased heart rate	332	15.4
Concentration disorder	330	15.3
Light sensitivity	309	14.3
Respiratory arrest	229	10.6
Onset of asthma attack	229	10.6
Vomiting	219	10.2
Numbness	215	9.9
Abdominal pain	205	9.5
Skin rash	201	9.3
Diarrhea	194	8.9
Tinnitus	189	8.7
Confusion/loss of consciousness	154	7.1
Ear pain	152	7.0
Other	110	5.0
Muscle spasms	100	4.6
Agitation	94	4.3
Skin blistering	58	2.7
Hearing loss	36	1.7
Fainting	23	1.0
Hypertension attack	21	0.9
Slowed heart rate	18	0.8
No complaints	16	0.7
Muscle paralysis	8	0.4

Table 10 presents the symptoms that continued for more than 1 hour after exposure to chemical agents, and Figure 2 visualizes these findings using a word cloud technique.



**Figure 2. Symptoms persisting for more than 1 hour after exposure to chemical agents**

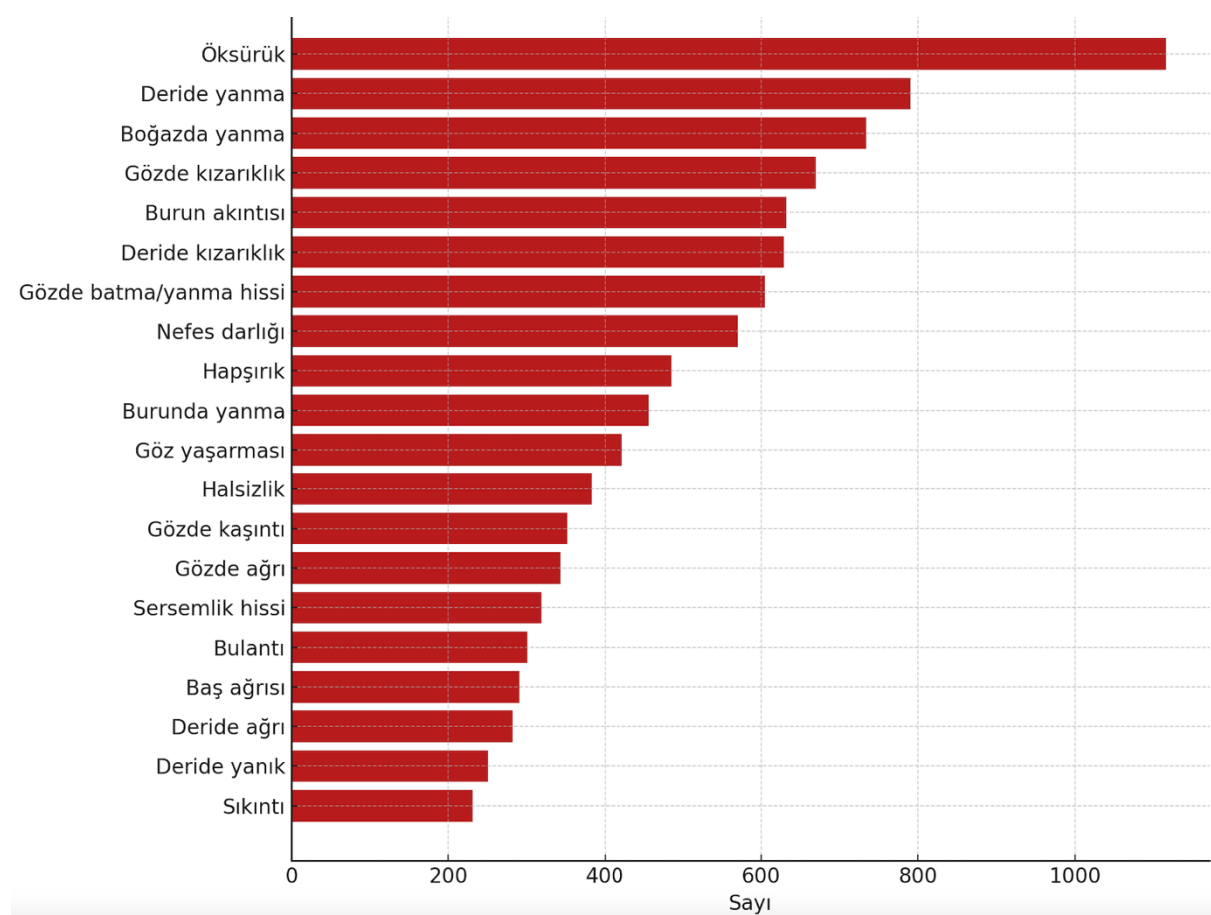
Cough, skin burning, throat burning, eye redness, runny nose, skin redness, stinging/burning sensation in the eye, and shortness of breath are the most common findings that persisted for more than an hour.

**Table 10. Symptoms persisting for more than 1 hour after exposure to chemical agents**

Symptom	Number	Percentage
Cough	1116	51.6
Skin burning	790	36.6
Throat burning	734	33.9
Eye redness	670	31.0
Runny nose	632	29.3
Skin redness	629	29.1
Stinging/burning sensation in eye	605	28.0
Shortness of breath	593	27.5
Sneezing	486	22.5
Nose burning	457	21.2
Watery eyes	422	19.5
Weakness	383	17.7
Itchy eyes	352	16.3
Eye pain	343	15.8
Dizziness	319	14.7
Nausea	301	13.9
Headache	291	13.5

Skin pain	282	13.0
Skin burn	251	11.61
Distress	231	10.7
Anxiety	201	9.3
Irritability	189	8.7
No specific symptom	185	8.6
Blurred vision	183	8.5
Difficulty swallowing	178	8.3
Eyelid burn	166	7.7
Skin rash	163	7.5
Light sensitivity	160	7.4
Diarrhea	130	6.0
Concentration disorder	129	5.9
Balance disorder	112	5.2
Difficulty swallowing	105	4.8
Abdominal pain	101	4.7
Increased salivation	101	4.7
Sweating	93	4.3
Numbness	79	3.6
Tinnitus	72	3.3
Ear pain	70	3.2
Onset of asthma attack	64	2.9
Vomiting	61	2.8
Muscle spasms	55	2.5
Skin blistering	54	2.5
Other	53	2.4
Agitation	43	1.9
Confusion/loss of consciousness	40	1.8
Hearing loss	27	1.2
Slowed heart rate	15	0.6
Hypertension attack	10	0.5
Fainting	6	0.3
Muscle paralysis	4	0.2

Figure 3 shows the 20 most common symptoms that persisted for more than 1 hour after exposure to chemical agents.



**Figure 3. Top 20 most common symptoms persisting for more than 1 hour after exposure to chemical agents**

Table 11 presents the health assistance received by participants after exposure to chemical agents.

**Table 11. Health assistance received after exposure to chemical agents**

Answer	Number	Percentage
No, I did not receive assistance	1508	68.9
I received assistance from volunteer health workers	540	24.7
I went to the pharmacy	54	2.5
I received assistance from ambulance personnel	23	1.1
I went/was taken to the hospital	64	2.8

*"After being sprayed directly—from less than 50 cm away—I experienced severe difficulty breathing. Later, when I went to the hospital due to assault, a CT scan showed a large amount of mucus-like discharge in my lungs. After approximately two weeks, I still have shortness of breath and occasional coughing."*

*"A few days after exposure to the gas, I went to the hospital with severe back pain, where the doctor told me I had inflammation in my lungs. A week later, I am still experiencing severe chest pain, coughing, and a runny nose."*

68.9% of participants did not receive assistance. Testimonies indicate that security concerns were influential in this attitude:

*"Liquid pepper gas was sprayed on my face and hands from close range; my skin burned for about 6 hours. I couldn't sleep at all due to the pain until morning, and everything got much worse after showering. I thought I was poisoned, but I didn't see a doctor at the hospital for fear of being flagged. It was the greatest pain I've ever experienced in my life. I kept my hands in a basin of milk all night, and the next day, when I put my hand into the same milk, it started burning again even with brief contact. I think what was used was a very serious chemical poison. That night, I desperately needed help from a doctor, but I couldn't trust anyone, and I don't know who to turn to in such situations."*

*"I didn't have time to go to the hospital because I was working. Even if I had gone, I didn't believe they would care about my problem because I participated in the protest. Unfortunately, the severe pain on the left side of my head, where the gas capsule hit, continues."*

On the other hand, testimonies indicated that the police directed those affected by gas by promising help and then detained them:

*"I personally witnessed plainclothes police officers who were aware of volunteers trying to help those affected with antacid medications and said, 'Come, we will help you over here,' then took injured people by the arm and handed them over to the police for detention. It is inhumane to try to exploit people who are suffering while experiencing the shock of being affected by such a chemical for the first time in their lives."*

Table 12 presents the symptoms that participants experienced after exposure to chemical agents that they did not have before and that are still ongoing.

**Table 12. Symptoms that respondents experienced after exposure to chemical agents that they did not have before and that are still ongoing**

Symptom	Number	Percentage
No complaints	1,128	40.7
Cough	563	20.3
Shortness of breath	373	13.5
Acne-like rashes	252	9.1
Other	170	6.1
Imbalance when walking and moving	95	3.4
Muscle weakness in hands and feet	76	2.7
Tingling in toes and fingers	65	2.3
Numbness in toes and fingers	50	1.8

20.3% of participants experienced coughing, 13.5% shortness of breath, 9.1% acne-like rashes, 3.4% imbalance when walking and moving, 2.7% muscle weakness in hands and feet, 2.3%



tingling in toes and fingers, and 1.8% numbness in fingers and toes; these were reported as symptoms that they did not have before and that were still ongoing at the time of their response.

33.6% of respondents experienced an injury caused by materials they believed to be gas canisters/plastic bullets/pepper spray capsules.

*"I witnessed plastic bullets being fired at head level many times in Saraçhane."*

*"Based on my observation, they throw plastic bullets to hit the body. I was able to protect myself thanks to my banner, but if I hadn't had it, I would have had serious injuries."*

Table 13 presents data on the injury locations for those who experienced injuries from gas canisters/plastic bullets/pepper spray capsules. 727 people reported 1,516 injuries. The percentages do not sum to 100% because multiple body regions could have been injured.

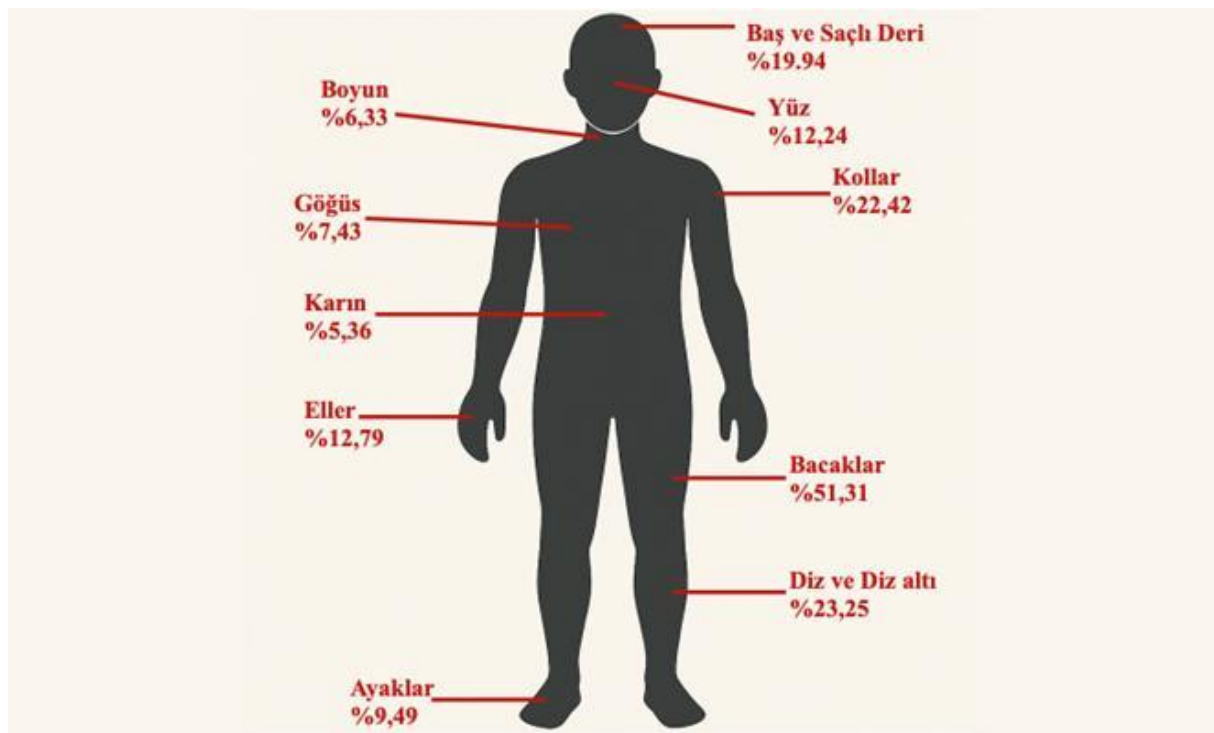
**Table 13. Injury location for those who experienced injuries from gas canisters/plastic bullets/pepper spray capsules**

<b>Body Region</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Legs	373	51.3
Back	187	25.7
Knee and below knee	169	23.3
Arms	163	22.4
Head/scalp	145	19.9
Hands	93	12.8
Face	89	12.2
Feet	69	9.5
Chest	54	7.4
Eye	51	7.0
Neck	46	6.3
Abdomen	39	5.4
Other	38	5.2

*"I was injured in the head by a plastic bullet. It swelled, and I experienced pain for days."*

*"The plastic bullet hit directly my ear, I couldn't hear anything for the first 25 minutes, then there was bruising, redness, and flaking."*

*"After being hit on my forehead with a plastic bullet, it first turned red, then in the following days, pain started in that part of my skull, most likely due to crushing, then it scabbed over and a rash formed."*



**Figure 4. Injury location for those who experienced injuries from gas canisters/plastic bullets/pepper spray capsules**

Table 14 presents the type of injury experienced by those injured by gas canisters/plastic bullets/pepper spray capsules.

**Table 14. Type of injury for those who experienced injuries from gas canisters/plastic bullets/pepper spray capsules**

Type of injury	Number	Percentage
Bruising	491	39.8
Redness	449	36.4
Abrasions	156	12.6
Other	63	5.1
Open wound	51	4.1
Eye injury	22	1.8
Fracture	1	0.0

*"The gas I was most affected by was the powdered gas inside the plastic bullet. A plastic bullet hit someone next to me in the face. While I was trying to help him, I was affected by the powder that came out of the bullet and scattered around."*

*"A piece of something that exploded and scattered in the air entered my right eye. Besides burning and inability to open my eye, I felt a throbbing sensation on the entire left side of my body, and there was also dizziness and loss of balance. This thing that explodes several times in the air can be dangerous."*

Table 15 presents the health assistance received by participants after injury from gas canisters/plastic bullets/pepper spray capsules.

**Table 15. Health assistance received after injury from gas canisters/plastic bullets/pepper spray capsules**

Answer	Number	Percentage
No, I did not receive assistance	1199	82.0
Received assistance from volunteers	174	12.0
Received assistance from volunteer health workers	36	2.5
Went to the pharmacy	17	1.1
Received assistance from ambulance personnel	10	0.6
Went/was taken to the hospital	27	1.8
Total	1463	100.0

82.0% of those who answered this question stated that they did not receive help. The reason for this is revealed in the responses to the open-ended questions:

*"I was hit in the head with a plastic bullet and lost blood, but I did not receive treatment because I could have been detained if I went to the hospital for treatment..." "I was injured by something I don't know what it was, most likely a gas capsule. It hit slightly below my ear. I think it caused a head trauma due to its impact speed. On the first day, I experienced intense loss of consciousness, twitching, confusion, vomiting, headache, and loss of strength in my arms and legs (I had difficulty walking for a while). Because of the close-range tear gas sprayed when we were beaten, I still have a blockage in my throat days later, and especially when I sleep, I constantly have asthma-like attacks. Unfortunately, I could not go to any healthcare facility because we were afraid of being recorded by the police."*

*"My head bled from being hit with a baton, and there's a dent. I haven't been able to go to the hospital yet due to the Eid holiday. I have a severe headache, especially when I lie down, and a burning and throbbing sensation in the injured area of my head."*

One participant recounted an experience concerning a nearby ambulance:

*"Even though I said I had epilepsy, the ambulances never helped; they didn't even let me inside. If my friends in the area hadn't helped, I would have lost consciousness. The burning in my eye and the bruising where the capsules hit continued for about a week, even when they no longer hurt."*

Volunteer healthcare workers intervened with and provided first aid to those affected and injured by crowd control agents, despite being affected themselves.

*"I had set up a first aid station in Sarayane. I volunteered to treat those affected by gas and plastic bullets. I was affected by the gas on my friends. I treated their cut eyebrows and split heads resulting from plastic bullets."*

*"I am a 5th-year medical student, and I don't know what substance was used, but as I observed, droplets scattered in the air were very clearly visible. It was practically raining like a light*

*drizzle. It initially caused a slight burning sensation on skin contact, but when we washed it with water or physiological saline, it burned much worse. Some people said they still felt a burning sensation for 2-3 days. But wiping both the skin and eyes with oil-based substances was quite effective and alleviated the pain."*

*"I stopped feeling my injuries after a certain point. My volunteer healthcare friends and I were generally injured while evacuating and protecting the wounded at the front lines, but we didn't experience any major problems because we had equipment. However, since the protests began, I have personally provided first aid to 80-90 people."*

### **Environment of Violence through Testimonies**

*"On the evening of March 23, after Özgür Özel's speech ended in Saraçhane, the police began a heavy intervention from the belt. Gas was sprayed from a close distance. While running towards the square, a stampede occurred, resulting in abandoned shoes on the ground, which became one of the symbols of the protests, due to those in front tripping over an iron bar on the ground. I don't know how many people fell on me, but there was a period when two people pulled me by the arms, yet I could not move my lower body at all. Due to the weight on me, breathing became difficult. In this environment where perhaps 15-20 people were shouting that they couldn't breathe, when I lifted my head, I saw a police officer leaning over me and spraying pepper gas directly into my face. He sprayed it directly into my eyes. Since I had a bandana and an N95 mask on my face, I avoided suffocation. However, I developed first-degree burns on my face. Despite intervening with Talcid water, I experienced severe burning sensation and redness on my face and eyes for 2-3 hours. The burning sensation and redness continued on my eyes, around my eyes, and the exposed part of my face for approximately 24 hours; my skin peeled. Since I was able to escape the stampede area by leaving my shoes behind, I ran in my socks to Yenikapı metro to avoid baton blows and beatings from the police. My friend, in the same situation as me, was severely beaten with batons many times while running to Vezneciler metro without shoes. We all heard very harsh insults. As of April 2, I still have pain and bruises on my heels and lower legs."*

*"Despite me walking out of the area with my hands in the air and crying, the police officer said, 'I've been dealing with you all morning, get the f\*\* out of here,' and hit me on the head with a baton. My head swelled, and my eye was bruised. This happened on March 23rd in Saraçhane. The bruise is almost completely gone today. I hesitated to get a medical report for the assault. Also, four police officers directly sprayed pepper gas on my face as I walked from the park to Vezneciler metro. When I fell to the ground in the crowd, one of them grabbed me by my hair and kicked me up from the ground, so much that my hair tie shattered and scattered into my hair. I was kicked along the way and told to run out, but since I couldn't see due to the gas and didn't want to fall again, I had to walk."\**

*"I am an ODTÜ student, and I cannot describe what we experienced near the A1 gate in words. It's nothing like the pepper gas I've been exposed to before. They throw it into our midst, and everyone is instantly miserable. We say, 'They just threw it, they won't throw it again right away,' but they do. Four ambulances came during the ODTÜ protest on March 20th. They fire plastic bullets without hesitation. My elders say they've never seen anything like this before. I'm afraid someone will die. After the TOMA (riot control vehicle) intervenes, we can't even move because we're soaked at night."*

*"I am a journalist and I followed the protests in Saraçhane for 4 days. The police used a lot of pepper gas and plastic bullets. They directly targeted protesters and journalists. I witnessed injured people. There were protesters who were hit in the head. I witnessed a protester who was hit in the head (I think it was probably a plastic bullet), his hands were shaking a lot. The chemical used on the 3rd day of the protests was heavier than on other days, it was impossible for us to work. The police consciously sprayed pepper gas into my eyes and on my head. I felt a severe burning and pain in my hair for long hours. My eyes closed due to pepper gas. At these times, I felt like I could go blind, which was a bit stressful for me. After I came home and took a shower, I had intense painful aches in my hands. These aches continued in the morning."*

*"At ODTÜ A1, since there are no broadcasting organizations, we are subjected to very harsh, excessive, unnecessary intervention by the police. Please hear our voice; a large number of gas bombs are thrown simultaneously, covering the entire road and escape points, and incoming ambulances are not allowed to arrive or leave, and even ambulances were hit with gas bombs. We cannot get any help; no one sees or knows what we are going through. Please be our voice. Sometimes the gases they throw are of a different type that immediately cause vomiting; I don't know what they throw."*

*"Around 11:30 PM on March 23rd, while walking down from Saraçhane to the tram stop with a Turkish flag with Atatürk's image in my hand, I was targeted by the police from the back. I was hit by gas canisters and plastic bullets. I tried to protect myself, but my arm and leg were injured. I couldn't get help because the police would detain me if I went to the hospital."*

## **Conclusion**

This report reveals the significant health problems experienced by individuals exposed to crowd control agents during the March 2025 protests in Turkey. The data collected from 2,165 participants through an online questionnaire provides a comprehensive picture of the short-term and persistent health effects, as well as the human rights violations encountered.

Key findings of this assessment indicate that:

- The vast majority of participants were exposed multiple times to tear gas.
- Approximately half were exposed from very close distances.
- They were exposed to tear gas for hours (average 5.5 hours).
- Two-thirds were severely affected.
- The most common health problems reported were coughing, throat burning, and shortness of breath.
- These complaints persisted even after 1 hour.

Furthermore, participants stated that:

- One-third were injured by what they believed to be gas canisters, pepper spray capsules, or plastic bullets.
- One-third of these injuries occurred in vital areas of the body.

These statements are a clear indication that law enforcement used these chemical agents in a manner that violates fundamental human rights and national and international regulations.

Additionally, chemical agents used for crowd control can lead to short- and long-term health problems, exacerbate existing health conditions, and even cause death, as tragically seen in the Metin Lokumcu case, whom we remember with respect.

The use of these substances, which can cause serious harm to human health, should be banned.

In addition to the health problems caused by crowd control agents, participants also reported severe human rights violations, such as:

- Police officers not having numbers on their helmets.
- Police officers directing protestors under the guise of offering help and then detaining them.
- "Health examinations" being conducted during detention.
- Sexual violence being used during detention.

<b>Symptom</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Nausea	301	13.9
Headache	291	13.5
Skin pain	282	13.0
Skin burning	251	11.61
Distress	231	10.7
Anxiety/Suffocation	201	9.3
Irritability	189	8.7
No symptoms	185	8.6
Blurred vision	183	8.5
Difficulty swallowing	178	8.3
Eyelid burning	166	7.7
Skin rash	163	7.5
Sensitivity to light	160	7.4
Diarrhea	130	6.0
Concentration disorder	129	5.9
Balance disorder	112	5.2
Difficulty swallowing	105	4.8
Abdominal pain	101	4.7
Increased salivation	101	4.7
Sweating	93	4.3
Numbness sensation	79	3.6
Tinnitus (ringing in ears)	72	3.3
Ear pain	70	3.2
Onset of asthma attack	64	2.9
Vomiting	61	2.8
Muscle spasms	55	2.5
Skin blistering	54	2.5
Other	53	2.4

Agitation	43	1.9
Confusion/Loss of consciousness	40	1.8
Hearing loss	27	1.2
Slowing of heart rate	15	0.6
Hypertensive crisis	10	0.5
Fainting	6	0.3
Muscle paralysis	4	0.2

Figure 3 shows the 20 most common symptoms lasting more than 1 hour after exposure to chemical agents.

Table 11 presents the status of participants receiving medical assistance after exposure to chemical agents.

**Table 11. Status of receiving medical assistance after exposure to chemical agents**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
No, I did not receive assistance	1508	68.9
I received assistance from volunteer healthcare workers	540	24.7
I went to a pharmacy	54	2.5
I received assistance from ambulance paramedics	23	1.1
I went/was taken to a hospital	64	2.8

"I experienced severe difficulty breathing after gas was sprayed directly from a distance of less than 50 cm. Later, when I went to the hospital due to assault, a tomography scan showed a dense mucus-like secretion in my lungs. Nearly two weeks have passed, and I still have shortness of breath and occasional coughs."

"A few days after being exposed to the gas, I went to the hospital with intense back pain, and the doctor said I had an infection in my lung. Although a week has passed, I am experiencing severe lung pain, cough, and a runny nose."

68.9% of the participants did not receive help. There are testimonies indicating that security concerns were effective in this attitude:

"Liquid pepper spray was sprayed on my face and hands from close range, and my skin burned for about 6 hours. I couldn't sleep at all until morning due to the pain. After taking a shower, everything got much worse. I thought I was poisoned, but I didn't see a doctor due to the fear of being registered at the hospital. It was the greatest pain I have ever experienced in my life. I kept my hands in a basin of milk until morning. The next day, when I put my hand in the same milk, it started burning again despite brief contact. I think what was used was a very serious chemical poison. I desperately needed help from a doctor that night, but I couldn't trust anyone. I don't know who to turn to in such situations."



"I didn't have time to go to the hospital because I was working. Even if I had gone, I had no faith that they would address my problem because I participated in the protest. Unfortunately, the severe pain on the left side of my head where the gas canister hit continues."

On the other hand, testimonies have been expressed stating that the police detained those affected by gas by directing them with the promise of help:

"I personally witnessed plainclothes police officers, aware of the efforts of volunteer people trying to help those affected with antacid drugs, saying 'come, we will help you over there,' taking injured people by the arm, handing them over to the police, and thus detaining them. Attempting to exploit people who are suffering and in shock from being affected by such a chemical for the first time in their lives is inhumane."

Table 12 presents the symptoms that respondents did not have before exposure to chemical agents and that are still ongoing.

**Table 12. Symptoms that respondents did not have before exposure to chemical agents and that are still ongoing**

Symptom	Number	Percent
I have no complaints	1,128	40.7
Cough	563	20.3
Shortness of breath	373	13.5
Acne-like rashes	252	9.1
Other	170	6.1
Imbalance while walking and moving	95	3.4
Muscle weakness in hands and feet	76	2.7
Tingling in fingers and toes	65	2.3
Numbness in fingers and toes	50	1.8

Among the study participants, 20.3% reported cough, 13.5% shortness of breath, 9.1% acne-like rashes, 3.4% imbalance while walking and moving, 2.7% muscle weakness in hands and feet, 2.3% tingling in fingers and toes, and 1.8% numbness in fingers and toes as symptoms that they did not have before and were ongoing at the time of response.

33.6% of the respondents experienced an injury caused by materials they believed to be gas canisters/plastic bullets/pepper spray capsules.

"I witnessed plastic bullets being fired at head level many times in Saraçhane." "Based on my observation, they fire plastic bullets to hit the body. I was able to protect myself thanks to my banner, but if I hadn't had it, I would have had serious injuries."

Table 13 presents data on the injury locations of those injured by gas canisters/plastic bullets/pepper spray capsules. 727 people reported 1,516 injuries. Since multiple body regions could be injured, the percentage total was not taken.

**Table 13. Injury location for those injured by gas canisters/plastic bullets/pepper spray capsules**

<b>Body Region</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Legs	373	51.3
Back	187	25.7
Knee and below	169	23.3
Arms	163	22.4
Head/scalp	145	19.9
Hands	93	12.8
Face	89	12.2
Feet	69	9.5
Chest	54	7.4
Eye	51	7.0
Neck	46	6.3
Abdomen	39	5.4
Other	38	5.2

"I was injured by a plastic bullet to my head. It swelled up and I had pain for days." "The plastic bullet hit my ear directly. I couldn't hear anything for the first 25 minutes, then there was bruising, redness, and peeling." "After I was hit in the forehead by a plastic bullet, it first turned red, then in the following days, pain started in that part of my skull, most likely due to the contusion, then it scabbed over and a rash formed."

Figure 4. Location of injury for those injured by gas canisters/plastic bullets/pepper spray capsules.

Table 14 presents the type of injury for those injured by gas canisters/plastic bullets/pepper spray capsules.

**Table 14. Type of injury for those injured by gas canisters/plastic bullets/pepper spray capsules**

<b>Type of injury</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Bruising	491	39.8
Redness	449	36.4
Abrasion	156	12.6
Other	63	5.1
Open wound	51	4.1
Eye injury	22	1.8
Fracture	1	0.0

"The gas that affected me the most was the powdered gas inside a plastic bullet. A plastic bullet hit the face of someone next to me. While trying to help them, I was affected by the powder that came out of the bullet and scattered around." "A piece from one of those things that explode and scatter multiple times in the air entered my right eye. Besides complaints like burning in the eye and inability to open it, I felt a throbbing sensation on the entire left side of my body;

there was also lightheadedness and loss of balance. These things that explode multiple times in the air can be dangerous."

Table 15 presents whether participants received any medical assistance after being injured by gas canisters/plastic bullets/pepper spray capsules.

**Table 15. Status of receiving any medical assistance after injury from gas canister/plastic bullet/pepper spray capsule**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
No, I did not receive assistance	1199	82.0
I received assistance from volunteers	174	12.0
I received assistance from volunteer healthcare workers	36	2.5
I went to a pharmacy	17	1.1
I received assistance from ambulance paramedics	10	0.6
I went/was taken to a hospital	27	1.8
Total	1463	100.0

82.0% of those who answered this question stated that they did not receive assistance. The reasons for this emerge in the answers to open-ended questions:

"I was shot in the head with a plastic bullet, I lost blood, but I did not receive treatment, because I could have been detained from the hospital I would go to for treatment..." "I was injured by something I don't know what it was, most likely a gas capsule. It hit just below my ear. I think it caused a head trauma due to its impact speed. On the first day, I experienced loss of consciousness, twitching, blurred perception, vomiting, headache, and loss of strength in my arms and legs (I had difficulty walking for a while). Due to the close-range tear gas sprayed when we were beaten and battered, there is a blockage in my throat even after days, and I constantly have asthma-like crises, especially while sleeping. Unfortunately, we could not apply to any health institution because we were afraid of an official record." "My head was bleeding from being hit by a baton, and there's a dent. I haven't been to the hospital yet because of the holiday. I have a severe headache, especially when I lie down, and a burning and throbbing sensation in the wound on my head."

One participant shared an experience regarding a nearby ambulance: "Even though I told them I have epilepsy, the ambulances never helped; they didn't even let me into the ambulance. If my friends in the area hadn't helped, I would have lost consciousness. The burning in my eyes and the bruising where the capsules hit, even when they no longer hurt, the burning sensation in my hands continued for about a week."

Volunteer health workers intervened for those affected and injured by crowd control agents, providing first aid as much as possible under conditions where they themselves were also affected.

"I had set up a first aid corner in Saraçhane. I was a volunteer to treat those affected by gas and plastic bullets. I was affected by the gas on my friends' clothes. I treated my friends' eyebrows split open by plastic bullets and their cut heads." "I am a 5th-year medical student. I don't know what substance was used, but as we observed, the droplets scattered in the air were very clearly

visible. It was literally raining like a light drizzle. It initially burns the skin slightly where it comes into contact, but when we washed it with water or saline solution, it burned much worse. Some people said they still felt a burning sensation for 2-3 days. But wiping both the skin and eyes with oil-based substances was quite effective and alleviated the pain."

"After a certain point, I didn't feel my injuries. While helping my volunteer medic friends to extract the injured and protect them at the very front, we usually got injured, but since we had equipment, we didn't experience a major problem. However, since the protests began, I have personally provided first aid to 80-90 people."

### **The Environment of Violence Through Testimonies**

"On the evening of March 23rd in Saraçhane, after Özgür Özel's speech ended, the police began an intense intervention from the police line. Gas was sprayed from close range. While running towards the square, a stampede occurred, resulting in the abandoned shoes that became one of the symbols of the protests, as those in front tripped over a metal bar on the ground. I don't know how many people fell on me, but there was a period when I couldn't move my lower body at all, even though two people were pulling my arms. I had difficulty breathing due to the weight on me. In this environment where maybe 15-20 people were shouting 'I can't breathe,' when I lifted my head, I saw one of the policemen leaning over me and spraying pepper gas in my face. He sprayed it directly into my eyes. I was saved from suffocation because I had a bandana and an N95 mask on my face. However, I developed 1st-degree burns on my face. Despite our intervention with Talcid-mixed water, I had a very severe burning sensation and redness in my face and eyes for 2-3 hours. For about 24 hours, the burning sensation and redness continued on my eyes, around my eyes, and the exposed parts of my face; my skin peeled. Since I was able to escape the stampede area by leaving my shoes behind, I ran in my socks to Yenikapı metro to avoid being hit with batons and beaten by the police. My friend, who was in the same situation as me, was subjected to violence with batons by the police many times while running shoeless to Vezneciler metro. We all heard very heavy swearing. As of April 2nd, I still have pain and bruises on my heels and lower legs."

"Even though I was walking with my hands up, crying, and saying I was trying to leave the area, a policeman said, 'I've been dealing with you since morning, fuck off and get out of here,' and hit me on the head with a baton. My head swelled, and my eye was bruised. This happened in Saraçhane on March 23rd. The bruise is almost completely gone today. I was hesitant to get a battery report. Also, four policemen sprayed pepper gas directly in my face as I walked from the park to the Vezneciler metro. When I fell to the ground due to the crowd, one of them grabbed me by the hair and kicked me to get me up from the ground, so much so that my hair clip shattered and scattered into my hair. I was kicked all the way and was told to run out, but I had to walk because I couldn't see from the gas and didn't want to fall again."

"I am a METU (Middle East Technical University) student, and I cannot describe in words what we experienced near the A1 gate. It's nothing like the pepper gas I've encountered before. They throw it in the middle of us, and within seconds, everyone is devastated. We say they just threw it, they won't throw another one right away, and they throw it again. On March 20th, during the METU protest, ambulances came four times. They fire plastic bullets without hesitation. My elders also say they have never seen anything like this. I am afraid someone will die. After the TOMA (water cannon vehicle) intervenes, we can't even move because we get wet at night."

"I am a journalist. I covered the protests in Saraçhane for 4 days. The police used a lot of pepper gas and plastic bullets. They directly targeted protesters and journalists. I witnessed injured people. There were protesters who received blows to the head. One protester I witnessed had been hit in the head (I think it was a plastic bullet); his hands were shaking البروتوكول. On the 3rd day of the protests, the chemical used was heavier than on other days; it was impossible for us to work. The police deliberately sprayed pepper gas into my eyes and on my head. I felt a severe burning and pain in my hair for long hours. There were times when my eyes closed due to the pepper gas. During these times, I felt I could go blind; this was a bit stressful for me. After coming home and taking a bath, I had intense, painful aches in my hands. These pains continued in the morning."

"At METU A1, because there are no media outlets, we are subjected to overly harsh and unnecessary police intervention. Please hear our voice. Many gas bombs are thrown simultaneously to cover the entire road and escape routes. The arriving ambulance is not allowed to enter or exit; a gas bomb was even thrown at the ambulance. We cannot get any help; nobody sees or knows what we are going through. Please be our voice. Sometimes the gases they throw are of a different kind that makes you vomit instantly; I don't know what they are throwing."

"Around 11:30 PM on March 23rd, as I was walking down from Saraçhane to the tram stop with an Atatürk-themed Turkish flag in my hand, a blonde policewoman, about 1.90m tall with a white helmet, punched me twice in the head for no reason. She said, 'Run, run.' Since I was not guilty, I found it ridiculous to run away. Because I walked down, she couldn't take her anger out, took the Atatürk-themed Turkish flag from my hand, hit me on the head with it, threw it away, and clubbed me. Two more male police officers came, hit me on the head, and clubbed me. I am telling this so it is not forgotten and recorded. I am telling this so that an account will be settled when the time comes. As a 38-year-old woman of 1.55m, minding my own business, I did not deserve what I experienced. On the night of Sunday, March 23rd, in that area, innocent people and students were massacred by the palace's police, by police officers with unnumbered white helmets. Let it be recorded."

"The police used liquid gas and plastic-coated pepper gas. Most of the time, they directly targeted individuals in the crowd. There was constant tension between the police officers using capsules and their superiors. The police were directly targeting individuals. Despite warnings from superiors throughout the night, direct targeting continued. As a documentarian trying to record one night, I was exposed to gas throughout the night. After similar exposures during the Gezi period, my allergy levels increased significantly. I have been living with allergies for the last ten years. I am again experiencing sudden sweats."

"My knees were injured and bruised as a result of assault during detention. Since I was detained in a reverse handcuff position, pain occurred in my wrists and arms."

"Our first two health checks, after our initial detention and before going to the courthouse, were conducted at the hospital. However, during the three nights of our 96-hour detention period, despite our requests to go to the hospital, we were examined by doctors in the detention cell, citing a governorate decision."

"During my detention in the lock-up (March 24/27, 2025), a female police officer searched me for a lighter, touching my genitals once. Despite my warning, she did it a second time, mockingly. Doctors came to the lock-up every day for four days and said they would conduct

a check-up. We said we needed to go to the hospital and refused the doctor's check-up. In addition to being exposed to gas, I experienced police violence. I applied to TİHV (Human Rights Foundation of Turkey), and they were very helpful. Thank you. Health to your efforts."

"Due to the gas attack also occurring in an enclosed space, we saw that even the employees at the İBB (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality) were suffering from coughing and unable to breathe."

"In addition to plastic bullets and sprayed chemicals, my legs and face were kicked, and I was physically suffocated. I still have difficulty swallowing and I stagger."

"After the police knocked me to the ground, they hit my hands with the edge of their shields; my knees were bruised and my hands were bleeding. I did not get a battery report 'to avoid prolonging the matter.'"

"I was beaten in a way that caused bruises on my lower body, including my genital areas, for over ten days; I was hit on the head repeatedly, and my hair was pulled as if it would be torn out."

"My lip burst due to police violence; I have bruises on my cheekbones and under my eyes. I received many blows to my head."

"My arm was broken as a result of police violence. What was done to us was no different from torture..."

"We did nothing to deserve this. The full list of what we seek: Rights, law, justice!"

### **Psychological Problems Indicated by Testimonies**

"When I think about all the moments I was subjected to police violence, my chest tightens, my heart rate accelerates with feelings of fear and anxiety, and I have difficulty breathing for a few seconds. I guess these are the psychological effects..."

"Due to physical violence and the events unfolding in the country's agenda, I started experiencing psychological problems, and these problems are intensifying every day. I feel under intense pressure, torn between resisting and thinking, 'If I'm going to experience these, why am I living?' leading to suicidal thoughts. I thought I should mention it since the development of psychological problem(s) is also a health issue..."

"Throughout this entire process, during peaceful protests in which I participated as my constitutional right, I was subjected to both verbal and disproportionate physical police attacks. Unfortunately, these events have caused psychological and physical trauma for me and most of my friends."

"The feeling of being followed, the feeling that police will emerge from somewhere at any moment, that they will take me and my friends in a side street. Apprehension of a house raid, being summoned for a statement, being searched, being arrested..."

"I am receiving psychological treatment with diagnoses of post-traumatic stress disorder and depressive disorder. Additionally, I have started experiencing insomnia, intense sensitivity to sound, fear, distress, and intense nightmares."

"I felt nauseous constantly for about a week; I think the reason for this might be Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder."

"There has been a significant increase in my anxiety; the frequency and severity of my attacks have increased." "My psychology has been affected; my feelings of hopelessness and sadness are intense..." "Help!"

"I felt terrible after entering my age and then seeing and marking all these things together."

## **Conclusions**

1. The TTB (Turkish Medical Association) questionnaire form on its website was viewed 10,274 times. 2,165 people filled out the form, while 8,113 people left the page without completing it. This data is a clear indicator of the trust environment in our country, as expressed in one participant's statement: "Please do not blacklist us, thank you."
2. Hundreds of participants expressed themselves through their answers to open-ended questions. This is also an indicator of trust in the TTB. Many participants expressed their trust in various ways and voiced their satisfaction that the environment of violence and rights violations experienced were made visible, documented, and noted for history. "Thank you very much for conducting this study. It will be a very valuable work against the use of chemical weapons against peaceful protests." "As a student involved in organized struggle, I am aware that the barricades we tore down on March 19th also tore down the wall of fear. The demolition of these walls necessitates professional, union, and party organization. Therefore, I thank you for this valuable survey. The growth of the organization of our healthcare citizens, and the increase in their awareness and initiative on issues such as torture and violence in detention are among my primary demands." "It's good that TTB exists, greetings and love!"
3. The testimonies expressed reveal the environment of violence in all its starkness, noting for history that peaceful protests, a constitutional right, were met with a hostile approach.
4. Data on injuries from gas canisters/plastic bullets/pepper spray capsules show that vital areas of the body were deliberately targeted. There are significant findings that crowd control agents were used with the intent to harm those participating in protest actions.
5. Similarly, the application of chemical agents from very close range, targeting the face and eyes, even in enclosed spaces, indicates that law enforcement forces at least disregard the creation of life-threatening risks.
6. 78.9% of the participants stated that they tried to protect themselves only with simple masks (scarves, cloth, etc.). This situation emerges as a factor that could increase the health effects of exposure.
7. In the assessments made by the Turkish Thoracic Society during the Gezi protests, it was scientifically established that chemical agents cause permanent, chronic, and serious health problems in the respiratory system. Despite this, their widespread and violent, at the very least reckless, use in peaceful actions is unacceptable.
8. Participants' testimonies show that the interventions of security forces have quite serious psychological consequences. Therefore, it is important to direct individuals to psychological monitoring and support services in the post-protest period.



9. Allegations of strip searches and sexual violence against women and LGBTI+ individuals are present both in the media and in individual testimonies. The meticulous conduct of judicial and administrative processes regarding these allegations is essential both for the protection of human rights and for institutional transparency.
10. Conducting medical examinations of detainees in police units is an unacceptable practice. All physicians have an obligation to oppose and not participate in this practice, which is contrary to medical ethics and fundamental rights.
11. 99.4% of the participants stated that they were intensely or moderately affected by chemical substances. In contrast, only 2.8% (64 people) applied to healthcare institutions for help. This situation raises concerns that those affected by crowd control agents have reservations about obtaining forensic reports or medical assistance, and that their access to safe and quality healthcare services cannot be ensured.
12. Tear gases and similar chemical agents have been evaluated as human rights violations in European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) decisions. Furthermore, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) classifies such agents among potentially harmful substances. Chemical agents used for crowd control purposes should be banned.
13. All security officials who have used violence against our citizens, intervened with the intent to injure or kill, and have been negligent must be prosecuted.

The Turkish Medical Association, as a requirement of medical professional ethics, will continue to defend the right to life, the right to health, and the right to live in a healthy environment.

## **Summary**

The dismissals of local government officials in Turkey in March 2025 caused widespread public outcry and were met with extensive mass protests. During peaceful demonstrations that lasted for days across the country, law enforcement used disproportionate force, and protesters were intensely exposed to crowd control agents. Due to the use of agents such as tear gas and plastic bullets targeting demonstrators, and even in a manner that would classify them as 'chemical weapons' according to the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which Turkey is a signatory, many people experienced significant health problems and injuries.

The Turkish Medical Association conducted a study via its website to make visible the use of crowd control agents and other forms of rights violations, to inform the public, and to warn the authorities.

Of the 2,165 participants in the study;

- The vast majority were exposed to tear gas multiple times
- Approximately half were exposed from very close range
- Exposure could last for hours (avg. 5.5 hours)
- Two-thirds stated they were intensely affected
- The most common health problems were cough, throat burning, and shortness of breath
- They stated that these complaints continued even after 1 hour.

Furthermore, participants stated that;

- One-third were injured by gas canisters, pepper spray capsules, or plastic bullets,
- One-third of the injuries occurred in vital areas of the body.

These statements are a clear indication that law enforcement agencies used these chemical agents in a manner that violates fundamental human rights and national and international regulations.

Moreover, chemical agents used for crowd control purposes can cause short- and long-term health problems, as well as exacerbate existing health problems, and even lead to death, as in the case of Metin Lokumcu, whom we remember with respect. The use of these substances, which can cause serious harm to human health, should be banned.

In addition to the health problems caused by crowd control agents, participants mentioned serious rights violations such as;

- Law enforcement officers not having numbers on their helmets
- Law enforcement officers detaining protesters by luring them with the promise of help
- "Medical examinations" being conducted in detention
- Sexual violence being perpetrated in detention.

All mentioned rights violations must be duly investigated, and all responsible parties must be prosecuted.

**TURKISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION**