



Research Paper

Disasters Discriminate: A Macro Study of the Global Scenario

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Abstract

Disasters are seen as the windows projecting inequalities in the society. Women seem to be the harbingers of change in the society especially after a disaster. Disasters also lead to the change in traditional roles, imparted by the society. The focus is on the gender inequalities that emerge especially after a disaster. Various research and studies show that women are the worst sufferers in any disaster or calamity. It has been observed that, there is an increase in violence against women as a post-disaster stress all over the world. At the backdrop of every disaster there is a deluge of socio-economic and political disasters. When we contemplate our society, we witness a varying gap pre-veiling all over the world whether a developed or an under-developed region. Women have no place in decision making process especially in the under-developed nations. Their lack of awareness and limited education, no learning of life saving skills like swimming, climbing trees, etc and no vision of using technology, cumbersome clothing, pertain to social constraints. Such social constraints largely handicap women and are left as the most vulnerable victims especially during disasters. The problem ponders Gender-Based inequalities that render the most extensive place among all the existing inequalities which are accompanied with gender violence and exploitation and the measures for the betterment of the Gender status in the society.

Key words: Gender, group-specific, violence, United Nations, IUCN.

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I. OBJECTIVE

- To focus on the gender vulnerability prevailing at pre-disaster, post- disaster and during disaster phases around the world.
- To recommend measures that enhances women's capacity to manage risks, with a view to reducing their vulnerability and increasing their opportunities of development.

II. METHODOLOGY

The research primarily focuses on the gender vulnerability and implications during the disastrous conditions all over the globe. The data is primarily based on the telephonic interviews, audios and videos of the victims and the Disaster Management teams and researchers working on gender issues. Secondarily data is collected from the United Nations Reports, the government reports, books and magazines, NGOs works, internet and other facilities. The collected and analyzed data has shown its local and universal applicability.



Figure 1 Women in flood situations

Disasters discriminate on the same scale as the society discriminates among people. The differentiated impact of disasters on men and women is primarily caused by the existing gender inequalities. Women have very limited access to resources like- physical, financial, human, social and natural capital such as land, credit, decision making bodies, agricultural requirements, latest technology, training services which makes them vulnerable during the disasters. The **United Nation's** handbook for measuring the socio- economic and environmental effects of Disaster (2003) emphasize, the one major consequence of a disaster is the decapitalization of women and their decreased participation in productive activities in the formal and informal sectors. According to **World Health Organization** (WHO), women and children account for more than **75 percent** of displaced persons during disasters. It is often observed; the women have no place in decision making sectors and suffer traditional oppression. The special needs of pregnant and lactating mothers are completely ignored. Women in developed countries specially suffer malnutrition, poor health, maternal mortality, illiteracy, despicable behavior, overwork, dowry, female infanticide, etc. Women are not considered the part of shared learning dialogues. These disasters showcase the sheer dependency of women over men. It's reported all round the world that women face increased violence and sexual assault in the post-disaster phase. Observing disasters through **gender lens** can help identify key issues for policy makers and practitioners who can bring gender issues to focus. A natural disaster can completely halt or reverse progress achieved over decades in just few years.

Impact of Disasters on Women

Gender inequality is prevalent all round the globe especially in the developing world. Gender Inequality is found in all the sectors of life whether social, economic or political. This inequality between men and women aggravates in the disastrous phase especially during the disaster and its post phase. In the engagement in disaster planning activities, women's reaction during emergency circumstances, household decisions, use of relief and aid material, access to evacuation, shelter and relief goods, etc women are always subordinated to men. For women whose economy was based on housework, the loss of private dwelling means- the loss of, livelihood, instruments, equipments, inventory, supplies and markets. Moreover, domestic violence appears to increase when men's sense of control is undermined during the disasters.

Women's pre-disaster familial responsibilities increase manifold and expand with the onset of disasters. Women have specific needs and face great psychological pressure after a disaster due to the loss of family and shelter. They are bound to take up the role of bread earner for which they were not psychologically or physically prepared. The survivor females are faced with rape and sexual assaults which acts as one more disaster on their frailty. Mainer times the life of women become pathetic and miserable.

The first reaction of women during a disaster is **Shock**. They have seen their family members die in front of their conscious eyes. Later, they face the **anxiety provoking** situations as they take up the new roles for which they were never prepared like- now they are the soul providers of their families which include the children, the sick, the injured, the infirm and the elderly.

The disasters also impact men through loss of family, neighbors, assets, livelihoods, income and the loss of social power. Men are responsible for family income, protecting remaining assets, safeguarding family

members against natural elements and violence and in participating in post disaster community activities. In such crisis, the male virtue as provider is put to test. The gender based social conditioning mostly does not give men and boys opportunity to develop the skills relating domestic chores and care-giving. No policies to support widowers and single men are observed. This disparity in coping mechanism victimizes men.

In response to this they resort to **Alcohol Consumption** and **violent tendencies** among men aggravate. So, these unhealthy coping mechanisms ultimately affect the members of the family and again making the women of the family most vulnerable. In the developing and traditional countries, the social status of women is determined by her association with her husband. So, even in the most crucial conditions she is not suppose to segregate herself with her husband and this leads to her continuous exploitation.

These differences are basically cultural and not biological. In the post- disaster conditions the parents are so much dependent on their daughters that they find no difficulty in allowing them in the sex trade. In the post disaster phase, there is rampant **human trafficking** of both women and children. During the **Nepal Crisis** in 2015, rampant human trafficking was reported. Young girls are married to much elder men in the guise of better life and they are trafficked to the world of flesh.

Highly Vulnerable Women

With the onset of disasters, there are outbreaks of epidemics also. Women are quite vulnerable to reproductive and sexual health problems and face increased rates of sexual violence domestically and by others too. Their vulnerability further increases with loss of livelihood, bread provider and care taker. Post- disaster stress symptoms are often but not universally reported more often by women than men. Existing inequalities are the root cause of women's disaster vulnerability. In post- disaster situations women are more vulnerable than men. The vulnerability of women is also heightened due to biological reasons. Women's vulnerability also rises due to their cumbersome traditional clothing. Many deaths of women which occurred during the **Tsunami (2004)** were due to the complicated attire which they are bound to wear like- Indian saree. Due to their difficult attires they were not quick enough in the evacuation processes.

It was found, due to the strong lashes, the attire of women were washed off and even if some of them survived, decided to sink and die, for they couldn't bear the brunt of being seen naked. (Chaman Pincha, 2008). This not only signifies social economic inequality but also the **Ideological inequality** that women and men carry over the globe where women are objectified. The trauma and stress faced by women during the disasters are added by the anxiety of the duty and responsibility of feeding their family. The women in the pre-disaster phase have a social support structure. But, after the disaster, they completely loose it which adds to their vulnerability. Many women face sexual assaults and rapes and are threatened to keep shut making their life filthy and pathetic. Lack of legal help to the illiterate women also shoots up their proneness. The heights of disparity in the social sector was observed when- In **Kilinjalmadu** village of **Tamil Nadu**, a boat given to the woman to earn her livelihood was taken away by the **Village Authority** on the pretext that the woman did not need it and it should be given to a man (quoted Vaudha Gokhle). A similar incident happened at other place when the auto-rickshaw was taken away from the woman. It's contrarily believed that the women require fewer resources than the men folk.

Women are the primary care takers of the victims affected by the disasters. Their care taking activity increases their work load with little resources which results in increased stress amounts and ill health. The Bangladesh Cyclone of 1991, Tsunami of 2004, Uttarakhand flash floods (India) 2013, Nepal Earthquake of 2015, the largest fatality was with women. Women are not taught skills like swimming, tree climbing, rope binding, economic capability, etc. They are believed to be the household laborers. This results in the devastating experiences by the women. Some women, who are skilled in agricultural activities, face severe problems because the natural disasters destruct the agriculture.

It was found that in the disaster of Bangladesh in 1991, the women waited for their husbands to help them decide the evacuation process which claimed so many lives. This study claimed that women folk have no share or limited share in the decision making activities. This is prevalent all round the world and especially in developing countries. But, with the passage of time, slight changes are observed. According to **Global Impact Report (2012-2013)**, the condition of women in decision making, survival and retention program and literacy have improved.

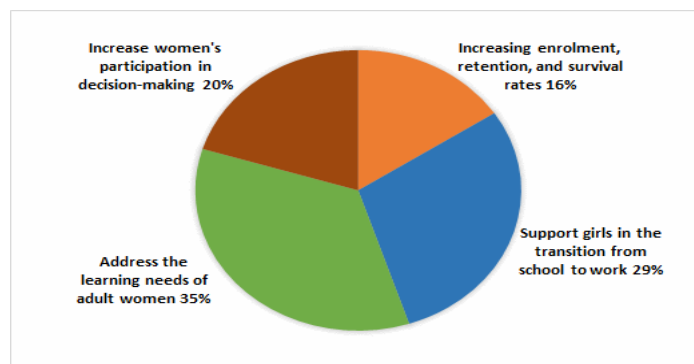


Figure 2 Global Impact Report- Projects of Life Course

In the flash floods of **2013, Uttarakhand, India**, when the rescue and relief teams questioned the households about their kitchen requirements, it was men answering the questions (quoted Priyanka Tyagi). This clearly signified that women were not allowed to answer even the questions related to their arena. Manier times, the girl child is bound to sleep hungry due to scarcity of food while man and son are fed with whatever available.

Disaster and Gender Statistics (IUCN) By Neymar and Plumper- 2007

Neymar and Plumper analysed disasters in **141 countries**.

- When it came to deaths, gender differences were directly linked to women's social and economic rights. In societies where men and women enjoyed equal rights, the number of deaths was significantly equal in both the sexes.
- Women, boys and girls are **14** times more likely than men to die during disasters. (Peterson 2007)
- In 1991, during the cyclone disasters in Bangladesh, of the 1, 40,000 people who died, 90% were women. (Ikeda, 1995)
- In industrialized countries, more women than men died during the heat wave that affected Europe in 2003. In France, most deaths were among elderly women. (Pirard et al., 2005)
- During the emergency caused by hurricane Katrina in the United States, most of the victims trapped in New Orleans were Afro-American women with their children, the poorest demographic group in that part of the country. (Gault et al., 2005; Williams et., 2006).
- In Srilanka, it was easier for men to survive during the tsunami because knowing how to swim and climb trees is mainly taught to boys. This social prejudice means girls and women in Srilanka have very few possibilities of surviving in future disasters. (Oxfam, 2005)
- Following a disaster, it is more likely that women will be the victims of domestic and sexual violence. They even avoid using shelters for fear of being sexually assaulted. (Davis et al., 2005)
- Nutritional conditions determine the capacity to deal with the disasters (Cannon 2002). Women are more likely to suffer from malnutrition because they have specific nutritional needs when they are pregnant or breast feeding, and some cultures have food hierarchies. For example, in South and South-East Asia, 45-60% of women of reproductive age are below their normal weight and 80% pregnant women are iron deficient. In sub-Saharan Africa women lift much heavier loads than men but consume fewer calories because the culture rules that men receive more food. (FAO,2000)
- In some cases, men's mortality also increases in disaster situations. Many men are exposed to risky situations and even die because they believe that by being the **stronger sex** they need not take precautions and because society expects them to take heroic rescue operations. Example- when hurricane Mitch struck Central America. (Bradshaw, 2004)
- In Kenya, fetching water may use up to 85% of women daily energy intake; in times of draught a greater work load is placed on women's shoulders, some spend eight hours a day in search of water. (Duncan, 2007)
- Extreme whether events create conditions conducive to outbreaks of infectious diseases, heavy rains produce insect breeding grounds and contaminate clean water resources while draught on the other hand cause fungal spores and spark fire. Pregnant women are highly vulnerable to water borne diseases.
- In refugee camps, girl children are more prone to violence.

Quick facts - IUCN

- Disasters lower women's life expectancy more than men's, according to data from 141 countries affected by disasters from 1981 and 2002.

- Women, boys and girls are 14 times more likely than men to die during disasters.
- Most of the victims trapped in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina was African- American women and their children, the poorest demographic group in that part of the country.
- Following, a disaster it is more likely that women will be victims of domestic and sexual violence; many even avoid using shelters for fear of being sexually assaulted.

Beijing Agenda for Global Action on Gender Sensitive Disaster Risk Reduction

It recommends **nine** achievable actions before **2015**.

- Increased political commitment to gender analysis and gender mainstreaming through enhanced cooperation and collaboration between ministries responsible for Disaster Risk Reduction, climate change, poverty reduction, gender issues with the participation of civil society.
- Develop and review national policies, relevant laws, strategies, plans and budgets and take immediate action to mainstream gender into National Development Policies, planning and program.
- Foster the linkage between risk reduction and climate change adaptation through gender perspective through policy and administrative measures.
- Collect gender- specific data and statistics on impact of disasters, carry out gender sensitive vulnerability, risk and capacity assessments and develop gender sensitive indicators to monitor and measure progress.
- Increase awareness of public and media on the gender sensitive vulnerabilities and capacities in Disaster Risk Reduction and management.
- Support research institutions to study the cost-benefit and efficiency of gender sensitive policies and programs in Disaster Risk Reduction, climate change adaptation and poverty reduction.
- Secure the actual application of disaster risk assessments as part of development policy making and program formulation to prevent disasters from making the poor even poorer.
- Improve and mainstream a disaster perspective and equal participation between men and women in the coordination of disaster preparedness and humanitarian response and recovery through capacity building and training.
- Build and enhance the capacities of professional organizations, communities and pertinent national and local institutions to enable the gender mainstreaming into all development sector.

Present Scenario

The **Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters** adopted by **168** governments in January **2005**, at the world conference in disaster reduction in **Japan**. It puts Disaster Risk Reduction into the context of sustainable development planning, programming and poverty reduction strategies and provides the opportunity for these issues to be addressed in emergency preparedness and recovery program. It re-affirms the approach of 23rd special session of General Assembly (Women 2000: Gender equality, Development and Peace for the 21st century)- A Gender perspective should be integrated into all disasters risk management policies, plans and decision- making processes, including those related to risk assessment, early warning, information management, and education and training.

The **United Nations** also adopted an **International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR)** in **2000**, as a partnership with governments, UN Agencies, regional bodies, civil society and communities. UN division for advancement of women, for example, organized an expert group meeting on the **Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality**.

BLESS an NGO in **Tamil Nadu**, works to help women venture into non- traditional income generating activities. Like- repairing and maintaining of hand pumps, masonry, etc. **SNEHA**, an NGO in **Nagapattinam**, extended its support for women cause. **HOPE** in **Tranquebar** has trained 60 women from fishing and non-fishing communities to masons. **CARE** puts special focus on girls and women when distributing foods and emergency supplies. Today **ASHA** and **ANM** are working together for gender planning and preparing. **Florence Flower Society** is helping empowering women to become self-reliant. **PRAXIS** is helping man to condone the use of alcohol as coping mechanisms.

The **Honduran** Non Governmental organization **Puntos de Encuentro** developed a community education Program with a key message-

Violence against women is one disaster that men can prevent

International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have been working in this field since years and have given strategies combined as **Strategy 2020**.

Women are now harbingers of change. Women are organizing their Self Help Groups to organize and promote the strengthening of women folk. Women are involving themselves into small scale industries for financial progress and their safety.



III. RECOMMENDATIONS

- We need to understand the diversity of lives, aspirations and aspirations of women of different age groups across the region.
- Televisions and workshops are effective way of teaching women about disaster preparedness.
- Incentives can be used to encourage young people to come forward as citizen leaders.
- Women **Self Help Groups** should be encouraged and trained so that they can spread their skills and tactics to larger areas.
- Courses like **National Cadet Corps (NCC)** should be encouraged and be made compulsory in schools for both girls and boys.
- The Disaster Management Programs should be integrated with other skillful courses too.
- Men should be imparted gender sensitive education so that they can develop a feeling of comradeship towards women.
- More women volunteers need to be encouraged while Disaster Preparedness Programs.
- Education on Gender sensitivity should be imparted at all levels of education structure.
- It is more beneficial to draw the combined teams of men and women during search and rescue operations.
- School management should be trained towards the adverse conditions of disasters.
- Measures to promote gender equality. Girls should be given education and they also should be taught skills like swimming, climbing trees, knotting, driving, etc.
- Mobile Health services should be equipped with sanitary and healthy reproductive facilities.
- Psychological training should be provided to both men and women to fight the disaster conditions.
- Disaster Mitigation initiatives should be integrated with community activities, which should involve local people- men, women and children.
- Women should be educated about the issues concerning their health and ensure their representation in the decision making activities.
- More women employees should be involved in the distribution of relief kits.
- The relief kits should meet women's basic and specific needs.
- Measures should be taken to strengthen the local networking among different Self Help Groups with the Disaster Response Agencies.
- Monitor and respond to women's needs in the areas of housing, employment and family relations.
- States and NGOs should help the victims in setting their livelihood, so that they can secure their future.
- The relief and assessment team should have both men and women in symmetry.
- Sex specific data should be collected consistently.

- Police teams should be organized in order to prevent human trafficking and molestation cases.
- The rescue teams should be such that, they understand the language of the victims. Therefore, local survivors should also be put to work with some incentives.
- Repair and reconstruction of facilities for women's community groups should be imparted primacy.
- Data that are gender specific, ongoing programs and projects should be shared with government authorities, others working in the field of gender studies.
- Despite huge mandate and need for capacity there are very few institutions dealing with Disaster Risk Reduction, there should be greater number of good institutions in the field and academic paradigm should be encouraged to study the group specific problems during the disasters.
- Most states lack Disaster Rescue Management institutions.
- By combining local knowledge with scientific data, we can build people's understanding about climatic risks and adaptation strategies.

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