



Gender Inequality Implications in Disaster Management: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Individuals of various genders and age groups, as well as differing socio-economic backgrounds, possess unique susceptibilities that influence their encounters with disasters and their subsequent capacity for recovery. Disasters, whether natural or human-induced, have a disproportionate impact on women and children compared to men due to pre-existing gender disparities in society. This impact is often exacerbated by poverty, social exclusion, and cultural norms that limit women's access to resources and decision-making power. This paper undertook comprehensive literature research to understand the diverse gender-related issues in disasters and the implications that gender inequality has in disaster management. The study found that even though there have been grave effects of disasters on men, there is a higher percentage of women and children who experience the grave effects of disasters. This paper thus suggests that in the bid to reduce the effects that disaster on women and children it is imperative to ensure that women are included in the formation of disaster-related policies and that the rights of women and children are acknowledged in disaster cases.

Keywords: Gender, Disaster Management, Gender Inequality, Disasters, Inclusion.



Introduction

People belonging to different genders, age groups, and socio-economic situations exhibit distinct vulnerabilities that impact their experiences with disasters and their ability to recover from them. In societies where gender-based discrimination is prevalent, women and girls experience increased vulnerability to natural disasters. Furthermore, it is commonly recognized that there is a notable increase in gender-based violence, such as rape, human trafficking, and domestic abuse, during and after disasters, alongside the already high mortality rates among women and girls in these countries. Women and girls face significant burdens resulting from various disasters, as they are primarily responsible for unpaid labor, which includes childcare, water procurement, and household sustenance (UNDP, 2010).

Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that calamities can also function as catalysts for facilitating the empowerment of women, enabling them to assume the role as proactive agents of transformation. Disasters may also serve as a potential opportunity for correcting gender disparities. In the phase following a disaster, it is feasible to mitigate entrenched biases against women by enacting initiatives that cater to their distinct needs and actively involve them as equal contributors in the reconstruction endeavors. However, the failure to involve women and girls in the formulation of disaster response strategies and the implementation of risk mitigation measures would result in the underutilization of the distinct abilities, expertise, and perspectives of half of the population. This would lead to a failure in addressing the needs of those who are most severely affected by disasters (UNDP, 2010).

The concept of the disaster-gender inequality nexus pertains to the manner in which disasters have the potential to intensify pre-existing gender disparities or give rise to novel forms of inequality. Gender disparities can manifest through several methods, such as differential effects on individuals based on their gender, unequal distribution of resources and authority, and the influence of gender-specific societal norms and expectations. Disasters have the potential to serve as a trigger for the exacerbation of gender inequality across multiple dimensions. Initially, it is important to acknowledge that catastrophes have distinct impacts on individuals based on their gender, with women frequently encountering heightened susceptibility and danger both during and in the aftermath of such events. Enarson and Chakrabarti (2009) argue that disasters have the potential to



exacerbate gender disparities by disproportionately impacting the female population. During the occurrence of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, a higher number of female individuals perished compared to males, partially attributed to societal norms that imposed gendered expectations on women, emphasizing their responsibility to prioritize the safety and well-being of their children and older family members over their own survival. Likewise, women may encounter limited access to evacuation or rescue resources as a result of discriminatory practices or societal norms that impose constraints on their mobility.

Furthermore, disasters have the potential to amplify pre-existing gender disparities through the reinforcement of conventional gender norms and stereotypes. In numerous communities impacted by disasters, there exists a prevailing expectation for women to assume caregiving responsibilities and domestic tasks, while men are anticipated to assume leadership positions in the context of relief and recovery endeavors. This phenomenon perpetuates gender-based power disparities and constrains women's involvement and agency in the context of disaster response and recovery efforts. As illustrated by the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, it was seen that women assumed the primary responsibility of tending to children and elderly family members, but their participation in decision-making pertaining to recovery endeavors was comparatively limited (Enarson & Morrow, 2005).

The examination of the gendered consequences of catastrophes can be enhanced by including the framework of intersectionality, a concept that elucidates the interplay between different social identities and their influence on experiences of inequity and prejudice (Crenshaw, 1991). An illustration of this phenomenon is the experience of women belonging to marginalized communities who concurrently live with impairments. These individuals encounter many obstacles while attempting to avail themselves of resources and services in times of catastrophes, hence exacerbating their vulnerability and marginalization (Khosla & Juwah, 2017).

Lastly, disasters have the potential to engender novel manifestations of gender inequality through the disruption of social and economic frameworks, leading to heightened instances of sexual and gender-based violence. During times of calamity, females, specifically women and girls, have an elevated vulnerability to instances of sexual and gender-based violence, encompassing acts such as rape, domestic violence, and coerced marriages. In the aftermath of the seismic event that occurred in Haiti in 2010, it was observed that women experienced a disproportionate impact in terms of sexual abuse and

exploitation, as well as economic instability and the deprivation of their means of subsistence (Gupta, 2011).

In addition, it is worth noting that gender stereotypes and societal conventions frequently impose limitations on the mobility of women, so impeding their involvement in activities related to disaster planning, response, and recovery (UN Women, 2021). In order to mitigate gender disparities in the context of catastrophes, it is imperative to adopt a gender-responsive approach towards disaster management. The integration of gender views throughout all phases of the disaster management cycle, encompassing preparedness, response, and recovery, is crucial.

Rationale for the Study

The rationale for the study is to understand the implications that gender inequality has in various aspects of disaster; preparedness, rehabilitation and aid distribution. The study also seeks to understand the relationship and intersectionality between gender inequality and disaster

Methodological Approach

This study adopted the secondary data sources of diverse literature that focused on gender inequality and disaster, and the intersectionality of gender and disaster.

Disaster-Gender Inequality Nexus

Undoubtedly, the occurrence of a disaster presents risks to all individuals in its trajectory; yet, it is evident that women bear a disproportionately higher burden of its consequences. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the mortality rate associated with disasters is higher for women compared to men. The size of this issue can be attributed to the variations in coping abilities across genders and the limited availability of information and early warnings specifically for women (Ikeda, 1995; Neumayer & Plumper, 2007; Oxfam, 2005; Habtezion, 2016). The gendered impacts of disasters exhibit variability contingent upon the contextual factors, and are intricately linked to the prevailing levels of gender inequality within a given culture. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the individuals affected by a disaster, it is important to possess disaggregated data pertaining to gender and age (Connecting Business Initiative, 2020). Vulnerability arises as a consequence of various elements encompassing socio-economic, geographic,



demographic, cultural, political, and environmental dimensions. Consequently, specific demographic groups exhibit varying degrees of vulnerability, contingent upon criteria such as gender, age, socioeconomic status, health, wealth, poverty, the presence or absence of disabilities, and other sociocultural characteristics (Field, 2012).

Individuals of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and age cohorts, encompassing women, girls, boys, and men, exhibit distinct susceptibilities that influence their responses to calamities and their ability to recuperate from such events. Females, both women and girls, exhibit heightened vulnerability to natural catastrophes in countries where gender-based discrimination is prevalent. Moreover, in addition to exhibiting elevated mortality rates among females, these countries also demonstrate increased incidences of gender-based violence, encompassing acts such as sexual assault, human trafficking, and domestic violence. It is well-documented that these forms of violence tend to escalate during and in the aftermath of calamitous events. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2010), women and girls bear a disproportionate burden in the context of catastrophes due to their responsibility for unpaid duties such as childcare, water provision, and household nourishment.

In the case of Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008, fatalities were predominantly comprised of women, constituting 61% of the total. Similarly, during the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004, women accounted for a significant majority, ranging from 70% to 80% of the total casualties. Furthermore, in the Bangladesh Cyclone of 1991, women constituted a substantial majority, including 91% of the fatalities (Castaneda & Gammage, 2011). The disparity in vulnerability to catastrophe risk based on gender can be attributed to the prevailing economic, social, geographic, and political power dynamics, as well as educational and informational disparities within society. Women frequently reside in close proximity to and regularly engage with natural resources and geographical features that are particularly susceptible to the impacts of disasters and shocks, such as marginal lands and informal settlements. In addition to male inhabitants, the aforementioned places also accommodate a male population. However, it is observed that females exhibit a comparatively lower capacity to endure the aforementioned disturbances. The constraints on women's mobility resulting from their attire, the unpaid caregiving duties they undertake for children, the sick, or the elderly, and their household responsibilities can impede their capacity to escape from disasters, especially those associated



with water hazards. Consequently, these limitations further hinder their ability to promptly respond and make decisions during emergency situations (Habtezion, 2016, p. 2).

The global population of women disproportionately represents the majority of individuals living in poverty. Furthermore, climate-related disasters such as floods, droughts, saline intrusion, and cyclones have a detrimental impact on women, exacerbating their vulnerability, poverty levels, and inequality. Women are frequently subject to the impacts of climate change due to their diverse roles as food producers and suppliers, health advocates, carers, and economic participants (WEDO, 2007). Females exhibit a higher prevalence of poverty, famine, malnutrition, economic downturns, environmental degradation, health complications, insecurity, and victimization in the context of violence and political upheavals when compared to males. The gendered division of labor assumes enhanced significance in the aftermath of a disaster, as a result of heightened labor demands and environmental transformations. This often leads to the reinforcement and, at times, amplification of gender roles. Nasreen (2012) additionally posited that the prevalence of abuses against women's rights is exacerbated by the challenges arising from climate change.

Throughout history, there has been a prevailing societal expectation for women to assume the responsibilities associated with childrearing, caregiving, and the effective administration of their households. However, contemporary circumstances have imposed more responsibilities and duties upon individuals (Adefisoye & Adefisoye, 2020). According to Moser (1993), contemporary women are burdened with several duties, which can be categorized into three distinct dimensions: the reproductive role involving childbirth and child-rearing, the productive role involving economic activity outside the household, and the community management role encompassing the responsibility for maintaining the efficient functioning of the community. In response to increasing financial demands within their families, women have assumed a more prominent role in the economy, contributing to the support of their husbands and the fulfilment of their familial obligations.

Women in developing and poor nations often experience heightened burdens during emergency situations due to their primary responsibility for procuring sustenance, water, and fuel. A significant proportion of women depend on rain-fed agriculture for sustenance. The occurrence of natural catastrophes often results in significant destruction of the natural resources that are collected by women. As



exemplified by Nasreen's (1995) observations, women bear a greater physical burden than men when confronted with natural catastrophes such as floods due to their involvement in gender-specific tasks such as procuring and cooking food, securing drinking water, storing fuel, and tending to the needs of children. During flood events, women actively engage in the protection of their residences, families, elderly relatives, domesticated animals, and personal belongings. Women participate in a variety of adaptive strategies to navigate challenging circumstances. These strategies include selling their assets, seeking other employment opportunities, adjusting their dietary and drinking habits, accessing community resources and social networks, providing primary healthcare for their ill family members, and participating in productive or income-generating activities that contribute to their personal growth and sense of purpose.

Despite cohabitating, individuals of different genders and age groups, including men and women, boys and girls, experience diverse impacts in the face of calamities. This poses challenges for individuals engaged in catastrophe risk management as the available data pertaining to affected individuals is often consolidated and rarely delves into specific household-level details. However, it also encompasses the concept of opportunity. According to The World Bank (2021), the greater the efficacy of policies and interventions in bolstering resilience universally, the more comprehensively we can ascertain the determinants that shape the disparities in catastrophic outcomes among different cohorts. In the context of disaster management, the documentation of assets and subsequent losses often focuses on the male head of household, leading to an overrepresentation of interviews conducted with them for damage and needs assessments. However, it is worth noting that the male head of household is often absent from home and may not always be the most suitable individual to accurately represent the needs of the entire family. Despite women being disproportionately affected, there is sometimes a lack of understanding on the extent of their influence (Connecting Business Initiative, 2020).

In the context of early warning systems (EWS), it has been observed that there are differences in how women and men access, analyze, interpret, and respond to signals. However, the warning signals often exhibit a bias towards the facts and conduct of males. According to a new analysis from the GSMA, there remains a substantial disparity in mobile internet usage between genders in low- and middle-income countries. Specifically, the report reveals that there are more than 300 million fewer women than males who have access to the internet through mobile devices. For example, the usage of EWS exhibits a



growing preference for mobile devices, however their accessibility remains skewed towards men rather than women. The limitations on educational opportunities and literacy rates, the timing of alerts that often coincide with women's involvement in cooking or childcare responsibilities, the additional burden of caring for children or elderly individuals while responding to alerts, and the communication of alerts that direct individuals to seek shelter even in the absence of adequate protective measures all contribute to the disregard of women's experiences and hinder their ability to access effective early warning systems (Connecting Business Initiative, 2020).

Nevertheless, the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the occurrence of disasters also present women with opportunities to act as agents of change. Disasters can also provide an opportunity to improve gender inequity. For example, the implementation of programs that demonstrate consideration for the specific needs of women and ensure their equal participation in post-disaster recovery processes can contribute to the mitigation of deeply ingrained biases against them. The underutilization of the special abilities, skills, and expertise possessed by 50% of the population raises concerns over the satisfaction of the requirements of those who will be most affected. It is imperative to incorporate women and girls in the planning process for disaster response and risk reduction measures in order to address this issue (UNDP, 2010).

Gender analysis of disaster

While it is well acknowledged that women bear a disproportionate burden in the face of catastrophes, it is important to note that gender remains a peripheral concern within the realm of disaster planning, relief, and management. According to ALNAP (2005), a limited number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) integrate gender awareness into their operational framework. In an era characterized by frequent and devastating natural disasters that receive significant media coverage, the absence of a gender perspective in the planning and handling of such crises is a matter of serious concern.

Disasters have had a profound impact on a significant number of individuals, resulting in extensive social, economic, and environmental consequences. Moreover, these events have shed light on the challenges encountered by relief initiatives and the capacity of the international donor community to adequately address the complex undertaking of rehabilitating and reconstructing the affected communities. Several variables contribute to the increased risk of



disasters in this region, including the presence of rocky topography, changeable seismic activity, and individual susceptibility to the impacts of high altitude (Mehta, 2007). Gender roles and cultural conventions often result in women and men being assigned distinct tasks, responsibilities, and experiencing uneven access to various social, economic, and political resources within both the domestic sphere and wider society. Consequently, these factors have a direct impact on the level of preparedness and resilience exhibited by individuals. Enhancing initiatives in disaster relief, prevention, and rehabilitation can be significantly facilitated by an understanding of the gender-specific situations and the resulting priorities they may generate. This objective can be achieved through facilitating the formulation of protection and mitigation strategies that are sensitive to gender and cultural considerations, and that are based on the coping mechanisms, comprehensive understanding, and resilience of local community organizations (Mehta, 2007).

The inclusion of a gender perspective can be beneficial in examining the roles of men and women in bolstering local community resilience to disasters, especially within populations that are particularly susceptible to risks. The recognition of humans as gendered individuals provides a crucial perspective for comprehending the influence of gender, as well as other intersecting social factors, on individuals' ability to cope with and recover from the repercussions of disasters.

Gender in disaster preparedness

The stage of preparedness involves several mitigation measures and pre-disaster preparedness initiatives (Fothergill, 1996). Several emergency preparedness-related tasks have historically been handled by women. Women are not included in disaster planning and preparation choices in underdeveloped countries, it is also underlined. In general, women and men conduct different readiness tasks, and formal emergency preparedness usually excludes women. According to Dijkhorst and Vonhof(2005), women may be less likely to participate in public life when their workload is increased during difficult times. It has been noted that female friendship networks help women get involved in grassroots groups. Women are considered an extension of their domestic duties and responsibilities since catastrophes can represent a threat to the house and society. However, in the aftermath, during, and after a crisis, women are frequently seen as strong individuals as well as being among the most vulnerable. For instance, rural women in Bangladesh are infrequently included in the creation of catastrophe preparations, although their socioeconomic well-being would increase (Khondker, 1996).



Women are resourceful players in emergencies because of their intimate knowledge of their communities, strong social networks, important family duties, and active employment, however, it has been noted that 'front-line' responders rarely acknowledge women (ILO, 2002). Women are also conspicuously underrepresented at higher levels of emergency management, in leadership positions, and in the decision-making process (Morrow & Enarson, 1996). The importance that women play in the family and community should be acknowledged in preparation efforts. According to Greet (1994), the neglect of women's demands and roles in production and development persists in development and disaster practice, despite the inclusion of gender issues in relief organizations' policy statements.

Traditional occupations often involve working under difficult circumstances and become more intricate during times of crisis. However, novel responsibilities also arise in such situations. The researchers also observed the significant involvement of women in emergency response, disaster planning, and mitigation endeavors, surpassing the level of engagement exhibited by their male counterparts. According to Ikeda (1995), women's social marginalization hindered their access to information regarding strategies for mitigating risks. In their seminal work, Palmer and Zwi (1998) examined the comprehensive involvement of women in all stages of the disaster response program, including the entire spectrum from initial planning to the final execution. It is anticipated that this initiative will enhance women's self-assurance, grant them healthcare accessibility, and mitigate their vulnerability.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that disaster poses threats to everyone within its paths, however, it has greater impacts on women. Research has shown that the fatality rate that comes with the disaster is greater for women than they are for men. This is large because of the gendered differences in the coping capacity of such incidents and events and the insufficient access to information and early warnings for women. Women and girls are affected in different aspects before and after disasters.

This is because they are usually disadvantaged as a result of the inequalities being experienced as a result of their genders. The only ways that women can be prepared is through education, economic empowerment, well-being, protection of their human rights and inclusion and leadership. State leaders by enforcing gender-sensitive

disaster policies will be able to empower women and ensure disaster preparedness.

Recommendations

To reduce the vulnerability experienced as a result of gender inequality there are certain measures are to be put in place to empower women and girls to be better prepared for disasters. Some of these are:

1. Inclusion and leadership:

Women are the most qualified to design and lead actions that promote, among other things, economic stability and health in the context of displacement since they are specialists at managing decisions that have an impact on their circumstances. To overcome inequities in terms of both policy and everyday practices, women may play a crucial role. As a result, they can help build resilient communities and societies. Female voices must be heard in efforts to study, adapt to, and mitigate the effects of climate change. In the context of catastrophe displacement, women's decision-making and responsibility can improve readiness (UNHCR, 2022).

2. Protection of rights:

Defending the rights of women and girls against discrimination is essential at all times. This can be crucial in situations involving relocation, such as those brought on by climate change and natural catastrophes, since tensions and conflict over few resources may heighten already present risks of rights breaches or lead to the breakdown of law-and-order processes. UN human rights procedures have acknowledged that some categories of women may be more in danger of having their rights violated if they are already in vulnerable circumstances. This is also true for marginalized groups, which in some social situations may include LGBTQ+ persons (UNHCR, 2022).

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