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Enhancing Disaster Resilience through Gender-Sensitive Policy Frameworks: A Case Study of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan is vulnerable to disasters, but recently, climate change has exacerbated its impact, which has led to adverse effects on the country's socio-economic stability. This research paper explores the gaps in Pakistan's disaster management frameworks and policies and proposes gender-sensitive disaster-resilient policy recommendations. It highlights the disproportionate impacts of disasters on the lives of women, exacerbated by socio-cultural norms. The study draws lessons from Bangladesh and Japan, which have successfully integrated gender-inclusive disaster mitigation strategies. Recommendations include equitable distribution of relief aid, ensuring women's participation in decision-making, increasing coordinated efforts among agencies, and enhancing community-based disaster management. The effective implementation of these measures will contribute to sustainable communities and better living conditions for women.

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Introduction

The importance of disaster resilience in Pakistan cannot be overstated, given the country's high susceptibility to an excessive number of natural disasters exacerbated by climate change (Hina and Saleem, 2019; Malik et al., 2012). Disasters, including floods, heatwaves, droughts, and earthquakes, have significant and adverse socio-economic impacts on the well-being and safety of communities (Sajjad, 2021; Waseem and Rana, 2023). Despite Pakistan's vulnerability to disasters, there has been no high resilience assessment to date (Hussain et al., 2023). Therefore, building disaster-resilient communities and fostering sustainable development requires efficient resilience frameworks (Malik et al., 2012; Sajjad, 2021).

Pakistan's geographical location and climatic conditions make it one of the most at-risk countries and are also cited as one of the top 10 countries in the Global Climate Risk Index (Sajjad, 2021; Sardar et al., 2016; Shah et al., 2018). The country has experienced severe disasters such as the devastating 2005 earthquake because of its location along the tectonic boundary between the Indian and Eurasian plates and the massive floods of 2010, 2014, and 2022 due to monsoon rains that increase the risk of land sliding in mountainous regions (Hussain et al., 2020, 2023; Jamshed et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2015). The 2005 earthquake with a magnitude of 7.6 on the Richter scale resulted in over 73,000 deaths, left more than 3.5 million people homeless, and caused extensive damage to infrastructure (Hina and Saleem, 2019). Moreover, the 2010 super floods caused the deaths of 1,985 people, a substantial economic loss of \$9.7 billion, and affected 20 million people (Jamshed et al., 2019; Shah et al., 2018). Whereas the 2022 monsoon floods were catastrophic,

killing at least 1,033 people, affecting 33 million people, displacing 5.4 million individuals, and officially declaring 72 districts as ‘calamity hit.’ These floods destroyed 2 million acres of crops and 2 million homes, highlighting the increasing frequency, intensity, and impact of floods in Pakistan (Hussain et al., 2023; Waseem and Rana, 2023). Natural disasters in Pakistan have profound economic, social, and human impacts, which result in economic losses, increased poverty and inequality, and the loss of jobs. However, these disasters disproportionately impact vulnerable populations, including women, children, and the elderly, highlighting the need for inclusive and equitable disaster management policies (Rahman et al., 2015). Gender-sensitive policies in disaster management recognise the different vulnerabilities of men and women in the face of disasters (Ferris, 2010). Women are more vulnerable during and after disasters because of social norms, traditional gender roles, limited mobility, and access to healthcare, leading to physical violence, psychological stress, sexual assault, and trafficking (Ferris, 2010; Jafree, 2023; Shah et al., 2018). Hence, Pakistan’s topography and changing climate conditions make it prone to frequently occurring disasters, with significant historical data under-scoring the impact.

Figure 1 (World Atlas, 2023) shows the location of Pakistan, which borders several countries and water bodies in the southern part of Asia. Pakistan encompasses the regions with the world’s highest mountain peaks, including K2, mountainous ranges, valleys, and river plains. Moreover, it also has irregular terrain in the Northern regions. Despite this, a country’s economy depends on its arid system coupled with climatic changes. These conditions necessitate a comprehensive and inclusive approach to disaster risk reduction. By addressing the compounding vulnerabilities of women, Pakistan can enhance its disaster preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. Gender-sensitive policies not only promote justice and equality but also contribute to building more resilient communities capable of withstanding and recovering from disasters more effectively.

Figure 1: Map of Pakistan



1. Literature Review

The inclusion of gender-sensitive and inclusive approaches in disaster management policies is imperative to ensure that both men and women are equally involved in risk reduction strategies, from preparedness to response, assessment, operation, and monitoring (Rahman et al., 2015). The relationship between men and women, defined by societal norms and traditional roles in conservative and resource-poor settings like Pakistan, creates differences among them (IFRC, 2010; Jafree, 2023). These differences lead to inequalities in access to information and decision-making powers, which in turn exacerbate the vulnerabilities and risks related to disasters (IFRC, 2010). As women become more aware of the local conditions of households and communities, they can be

essential agents for environmental protection and disaster management (Jafree, 2023). However, it would be hypocritical to burden them with the recovery and response efforts without adequate empowerment and support (Jafree, 2023). Gender mainstreaming in the disaster management cycles has already been implemented in developed and developing countries, which sets an example for Pakistan to adopt those frameworks and redesign them according to the setting of Pakistan.

Bangladesh has made significant developments in integrating gender sensitivity into disaster management policies, starting with the Cyclone Preparedness Program in 1972 (Hasan et al., 2019). In 2004, the Comprehensive Disaster Management Program (CDMP) was launched, incorporating gender sensitivities into policies (Hasan et al., 2019). The Standing Orders on Disasters (SOD), developed in 1997 and revised in 2010 and 2019, explicitly addressed women's issues, significantly impacting gender-sensitive disaster resilience strategies. (Bari et al., 2024; Hasan et al., 2019; Nahar et al., 2024). Following the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR, 2015-2030) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2015-2030), Bangladesh has strengthened its efforts to build a gender-inclusive disaster management framework (Bari et al., 2024; Hasan et al., 2019; Nahar et al., 2024). So, now the Disaster Management Act 2012, the National Plan for Disaster Management (NPDM, 2010-2015), and the Climate Change Gender Action Plan (ccGAP, 2013) have emphasised gender-based security, early warning systems, and gender-responsive infrastructure development (Hasan et al., 2019; Nahar et al., 2024; Nasreen, 2022). While strides have been made, there is still room left to realise the full potential of these policies related to overcoming challenges like gender-based violence and security in disaster scenarios (Nahar et al., 2024; Nasreen, 2022).

Similarly, Japan's efforts towards gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction strategies gained momentum after the 1995 Kobe earthquake, the 2008 Hanshin Awaji disaster, and the 2011 East Japan earthquake, which revealed the hierarchical and patriarchal nature of disaster preparedness across Japan's municipalities (Kimber and Steele, 2021; Petraroli and Baars, 2022). After the 2011 East Japan Earthquake, two notable women's organisations emerged, named Rise Together: Women's Network for East Japan Disaster and Japan Women's Network for Gender Equality and Disaster Risk Reduction (JWNDRR) (Kimber and Steele, 2021). Following the 2016 Kumamoto earthquake, the Fukuako government launched a 'Mini-Booklet' project that contains information about disaster preparedness, addressing the needs of families, and how to respond in times of disaster, designed specifically for children and women, to provide adequate support (Petraroli and Baars, 2022). Moreover, Japan's formal DRR education begins in kindergarten, where children are educated through periodic courses and compulsory school drills. Formal disaster education includes evacuation procedures, mutual aid benefits, privacy, and safety evacuation in shelters for women and children (Karima, 2024; Koussayer, 2023). At the international level, Japan has established its expertise in the United Nations system and hosted three DRR conferences: the Yokohama Strategy in 1994, the Hyogo Framework for Action in 2005, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) in 2015 (Kimber and Steele, 2021; Petraroli and Baars, 2022). On the positive side, these policies have highlighted and addressed the needs and vulnerabilities of women by including the gender aspect in disaster-resilient approaches, increasing awareness, and improving the privacy and safety of women in evacuation shelters (Kimber and Steele, 2021; Koussayer, 2023). However, the gaps in the policies revealed that full representation of women in disaster risk reduction has not been achieved. Therefore, holistic and inclusive approaches are needed to overcome the cultural and institutional barriers to integrating gender perspectives at all levels (Karima, 2024; Koussayer, 2023).

Moreover, many previously done studies have highlighted the gender impacts of disasters, with women being disproportionately affected in disasters because of the patriarchal system, existing gender inequalities, limited access to healthcare, and restricted mobility (Raza, 2017; Sadia et al., 2016). For example, in the 2010 floods, 51% of the affected population was female, and only 26% of the childbirths were assisted by skilled birth attendants (Sadia et al., 2016). Similarly, in the 2022

floods, reports revealed that Basti Ahmed Din, a district in Punjab, was transformed into an island, and community elders decided that only men should travel to relief camps by boat and leave the women in the houses more susceptible to water-borne diseases (Aslam, 2024). Also, in the province of Sindh, women reported that they don't have access to clean water, and due to water scarcity, they have to go to far-off places on foot, which increases their risk of malnutrition, vulnerability to sexual violence, and mental health issues (Aslam, 2024). According to the Pakistan Maternal Mortality Survey (PMMS, 2019), in the last five years, women from all provinces, ranging from 11% to 30%, suffered from natural disasters; 15.3% of women didn't receive any cash transfer support in the wake of environmental crisis; and 42.8% of women had no organisational support available in their villages (Jafree, 2023). Moreover, 21% of women experienced flood disasters, 4.5% from droughts, 2.3% suffered from earthquakes, and 4.9% from other disasters (Jafree, 2023). Hence, incorporating gender-sensitive approaches into disaster resilience strategies proved to be beneficial for developed and developing countries. These policies have highlighted the significant benefits of increased female participation in decision-making, empowerment through tailored educational initiatives, and enhanced safety and privacy for women in shelters in disaster management. Pakistan can build a disaster-resilient framework by adopting these policies, and institutionalising gender sensitivity through early warning systems, recovery and response initiatives, and enhancing women's empowerment, benefiting not only women but also communities.

2. Disaster management policies in Pakistan

For more than a decade, Pakistan has been putting efforts into developing a comprehensive approach to managing disaster risks in Pakistan and has formulated frameworks and action plans. These disaster management plans have some similarities, and some initiatives have been made over the years. Table 1 shows the goals and objectives, previous efforts, and gender perspective of the policies and approaches in Pakistan.

Table 1: The Goals And Objectives, Previous Efforts, And Gender Perspective of The Policies And Approaches in Pakistan

Disaster Management Policy	Objectives and Goals	Past Initiatives	Gender Perspective
National Disaster Risk Management Framework (2007) (NDMA, 2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening disaster management authorities • Development vulnerability atlas and assessments • Training programs and awareness campaigns • Establishment of a multi-hazard early warning system and an emergency response system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency Relief Cell (ERC) • Federal Flood Commission • One Window Operation following the 2005 earthquake 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the vulnerabilities of vulnerable groups through targeted practices • Promote inclusive approaches to ensure women's participation
National Disaster Response Plan (2010) (NDMA, 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing coordination between governmental and non-governmental organisations • Development of disaster management plans • Resource allocation and utilisation in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulation of national and provincial disaster management authorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prohibition of discrimination based on sex, caste, community, or religion in relief efforts for disaster victims • Capacity building for women by involving

	<p>preparation and recovery responses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote training, research, and awareness 		<p>them in disaster preparedness activities</p>
<p>National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy (2013) (NDMA, 2013)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct macro level hazard and risk assessments • Development of a multi-hazard early warning system • Implement community-based disaster risk management practices • Provide strategic direction for human resource management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRR) through pilot projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasise on the differential impacts of disasters and support gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction approaches
<p>National Disaster Mitigation Plan Remodelled II (2023) (NDMA, 2023)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of guidelines for the National Monsoon Contingency Plan 2023 • Preparing a National Contingency Plan for Winter 2023 • Remodelling the National Emergencies Operation Centre (NEOC) • Building capacity through training and research • Strengthening the early hazards warning system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) after 2012, 2014, and 2022 floods • National Disaster Management Plan-I Achievements (2012-2022) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocates for community participation and resilience among vulnerable groups
<p>National Disaster Management Plan III (2024) (NDMA, 2024)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity building of stakeholders • Integrating DRR practices with the SDGs to ensure environmental conservation • Preparing inclusive DRR plans • Operationalising NEOC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing National Disaster Management Plans (NDMP – I and NDMP – II) • Conduction MIRA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target gender and vulnerable groups for inclusive DRR • NDMA’s Gender and Child Cell focuses on sex-disaggregated data for assessments

3. Policy gaps in Pakistan

4.1 Framework gaps in policies and approaches

Despite Pakistan’s efforts to implement inclusive disaster management policies, there are many policy gaps that need to be addressed for better gender-sensitive disaster resilience approaches. The following are the primary factors that are lacking in the frameworks and policies being developed in Pakistan.

i. Lack of strategic focus

The government prioritises short-term disaster preparedness, recovery, and response efforts rather than long-term solutions (Cheema et al., 2016). The institutions and systems are not equipped to handle large-scale disasters. The 2022 floods exposed deficiencies in water supply administration and urban planning, highlighting the country's weak capacity for disaster mitigation (Aleha et al., 2024).

ii. Regulatory and legislative gaps

The formulated policies are more directed at the national level, and their implementation has not yet reached lower levels, which results in insufficient disaster preparedness (Faiz et al., 2015). Despite the formation of disaster management institutes and long-term plans such as the National Emergency Management Programme, disaster risk financing lacks transparency and coherence because of the least coordination from the top hierarchy to the bottom in implementation (Aleha et al., 2024)(Faiz et al., 2015)(Cheema et al., 2016).

iii. Marginalisation of local communities

Disaster management institutions have not been established at the local level, and over the years, disaster management approaches have failed to engage the local communities in planning and policy implementation (Faiz et al., 2015)(Cheema et al., 2016). Vulnerable communities exhibit a lack of preparedness in the wake of disasters despite substantial investments (Raza, 2017). The rural areas of Pakistan, particularly disaster-prone areas, require tailored strategies that consider unique climate-induced hazards and geographic dynamics affecting them, which current practices clearly lack (Memon, 2020).

iv. Lack of gender analysis in policies

Current approaches fail to incorporate gender analysis and do not cater to the unique socio-economic impacts of these disasters on women, which leads to challenges in providing support in rehabilitation efforts (Shahid Hussain et al., 2023). This is a general disinterest and inefficiency on the part of the government in addressing these needs.

v. Exclusion from Policy Formulation

Women are largely excluded from policy formulation processes and underrepresented in high-ranking positions, especially those related to organisations related to climate change and disaster risk reduction (Aslam, 2024). Their roles are merely restricted to domestic use, ignoring their contribution to agricultural and other sectors (Aslam, 2024).

vi. Institutional Fragmentation

There are various non-governmental organisations working on disaster relief and recovery efforts. However, the efforts of these organisations and government agencies are not coordinated, which leads to fragmented and less effective disaster management.

3.2 Contributing Factors Behind These Gaps

i. Economic Constraints

Rising population and rapid urbanisation raise the struggles of Pakistan to meet the needs of people in terms of poverty alleviation, health, and other factors, due to which it is difficult to allocate a portion of resources to emergency planning (Cheema et al., 2016).

ii. Patriarchal Norms and Gender Roles

Women are more vulnerable in times of disaster because of deeply rooted traditional roles that constrain them within the boundaries of the house (Shahid Hussain et al., 2023). This religio-cultural fabric not only restricts their access to resources, education, and health facilities but also makes them dependent on male family members for economic activities (Shahid Hussain et al., 2023). Women bear a disproportionate burden of disaster risks, e.g., in times of water scarcity, women have to fetch water for their families from long distances, which leads to deteriorated health with restricted or no access to healthcare facilities (Aslam, 2024).

iii. Social Inequalities and Vulnerabilities

A significant proportion of Pakistan lives in rural areas, which are more prone to disasters such as flooding, droughts, etc (Raza, 2017). These communities, particularly women, elders, and children, lack education and land ownership, and disparities in terms of income and resources amplify their susceptibility to disasters (Aleha et al., 2024) (Raza, 2017).

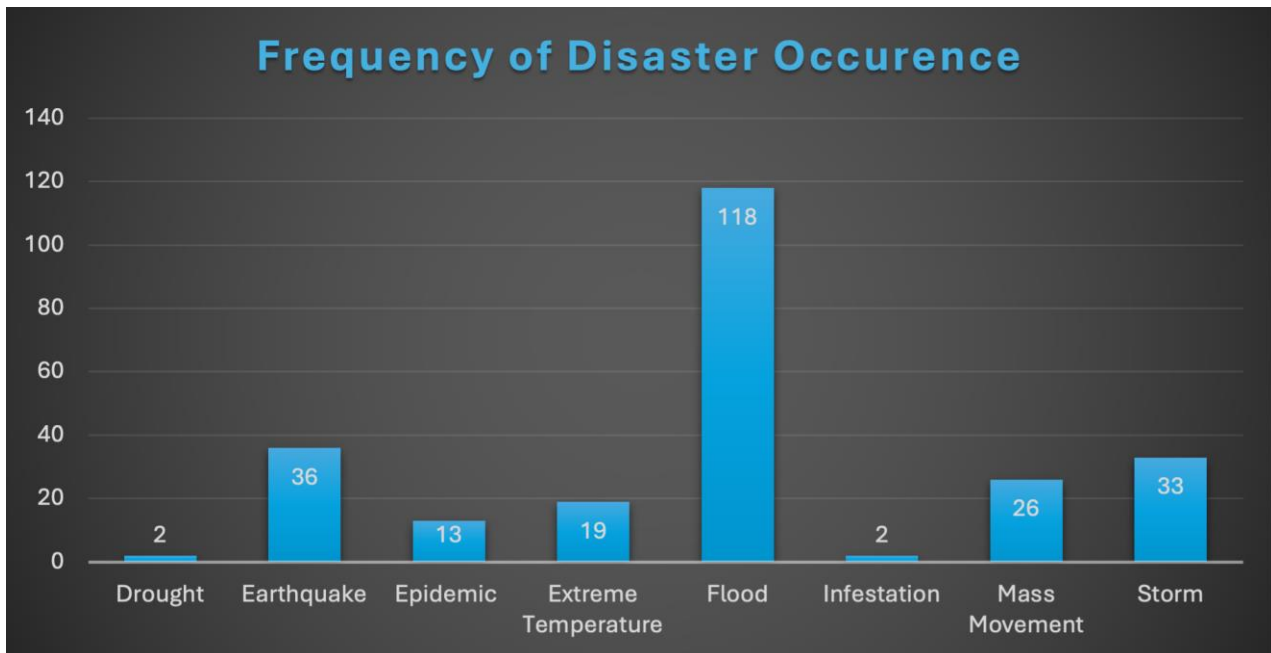
4. Case study: Disasters in Pakistan (1950 – 2023)

Several catastrophic events over the years have highlighted Pakistan's vulnerability to several disasters. These disasters not only brought loss to life and property but have also exposed the major gaps in Pakistan's policies, as stated before. This section will explore the history of disasters in Pakistan, especially the most disastrous ones, and examine their gendered impacts.

4.1 History of Disasters

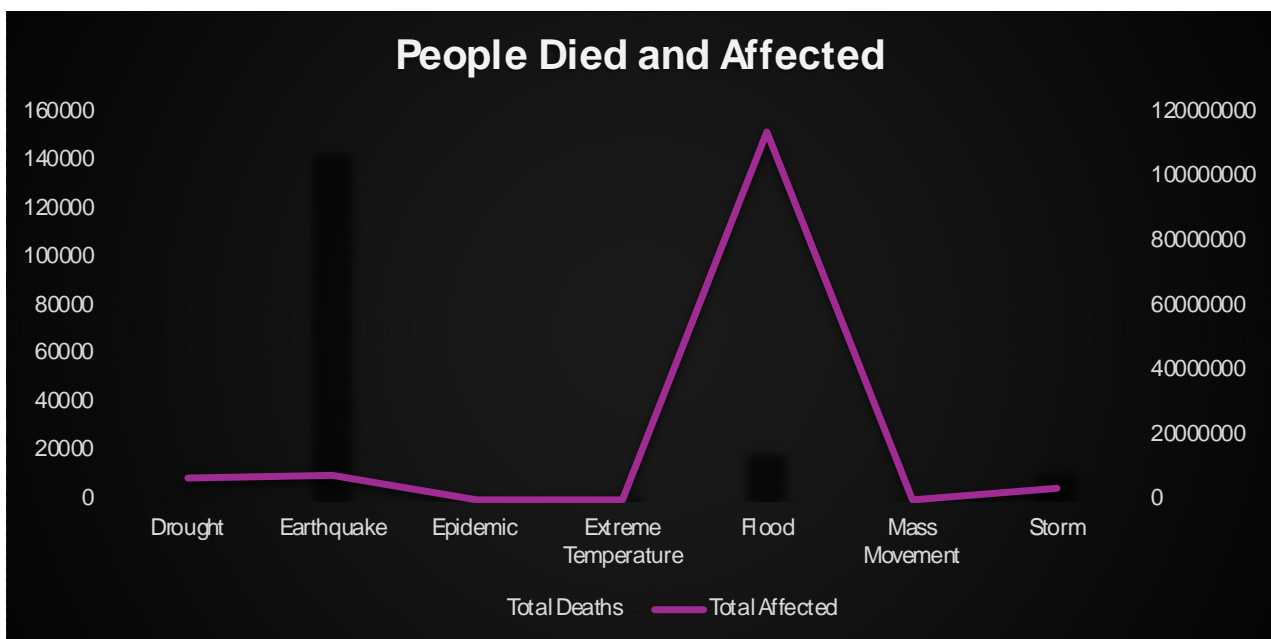
Pakistan has experienced numerous disasters since its inception, causing significant damage to people and property. Figure 2 shows that from the 1950s until 2023, floods have been the most frequent natural hazard, occurring 118 times (EM-DAT, 2024), affecting human lives and properties. However, floods themselves are not the cause, but the population living in flood-prone areas near riverbanks and canals. In the same period, earthquakes have occurred 36 times (EM-DAT, 2024), causing more economic losses than human losses. Pakistan's northern regions, along the Hindukush Mountain ranges, are more susceptible to plate movement, posing a significant earthquake hazard.

Figure 2: Frequency of Disaster Occurrences in Pakistan



Similarly, in Figure 3, from the 1950s to 2023, earthquakes caused a greater number of deaths than flooding because of the immediate risk of infrastructure loss. However, a greater number of people were affected by floods than by earthquakes due to the larger proportion of the population living in rural areas and near the riverbanks.

Figure 3: People Died and Affected by Disasters in Pakistan



The most catastrophic disasters in the history of Pakistan are the 2005 earthquake, the 2010 floods, and the 2022 floods. The 2005 earthquake, with a magnitude of 7.6 on the Richer scale, caused more than 1 million deaths, with more than 900 aftershocks and significant casualties of children because of the collapse of school buildings (Hina and Saleem, 2019). The 2010 floods in Pakistan were a significant disaster, affected 20 million people, and caused a financial loss of 9.5 billion USD (Ashraf et al., 2023; Cheema et al., 2016). In contrast to 2022, the devastating floods in Pakistan's history affected 33 million people and caused 33 billion USD of economic losses (Ashraf et al., 2023).

4.2 Gendered Impact of Disasters

Gendered perspectives have not been considered intricately in the disaster resilience policies of Pakistan, and previously occurring disasters have portrayed the vulnerabilities of women in the aftermath of these disasters. Women bear a disproportionate burden when there is water scarcity; they travel multiple times a day to fetch water from faraway places (Aslam, 2024). This heavy physical labour leads to skeletal and pelvic deformities, malnutrition, joint pain, miscarriages, and other health issues (Aslam, 2024). Moreover, the lack of clean water and poor sanitation facilities increase the risk of infections for menstruating and nursing women (Aslam, 2024). In the floods of 2022, 650,000 pregnant women were displaced; 73,000 were expected to deliver next month, but there were no maternal health services available for their immediate support (Ahmed, 2022). One of the stories narrated in a news article about a disaster that tore women apart was, "Having struggled with the language barrier all day, I was surprised when she asked for 'iron dawai' (Iron medicine) in fluent Urdu. One look at her pale, bony face made it obvious that she was severely anaemic. To make matters more difficult for her, she was six months pregnant with no access to even basic antenatal care. I asked her if there was a hospital nearby that she had access to. She said no, of course, the baby would be born at home - the only hospital she knew of had been rendered inaccessible by floodwater" (Umar, 2022). These disasters exacerbate the existing gender inequalities, as women are also seen as primary carers and the traditional roles associated with them hinder their ability to evacuate properly and promptly, looking after children and the elderly (Akbar et al., 2024; Aleha et al., 2024; Ashraf et al., 2024). Women's inability to do house chores in times of disaster leads to domestic violence, and travelling to far-off places to fulfil the needs of households also results in harassment, sex trafficking, and sexual violence (Akbar et al., 2024; Aslam, 2024). It has been seen that women have a high mortality rate in disasters, and this is attributed to their lack of capacity to resist the force of disasters because of their inability to swim or climb a tree rather than sticking to the responsibility of saving disabled people and children (Aleha et al., 2024). This humanitarian crisis affects the female population more, and women are 14 times more likely to die than men because of unhygienic camps and water-borne diseases (Nizamani, 2022). Therefore, already existing gender inequalities and taboos and a strict code of honour to talk about sexual health and menstruation further lead to gender discrimination in the aftermath of disasters and make women suffer from physical and mental health issues. The lack of gender-sensitive disaster management policies further exacerbates these issues, overlooking the needs and vulnerabilities of women in response and recovery. To build a more resilient society, it is imperative to consider gender perspectives and develop more inclusive disaster risk reduction strategies that address this issue comprehensively.

5. Recommendations

- **Incorporate cultural context:** Disaster management policies should consider the sociodynamics of society and cultural practices while formulating them. In this way, the strategies would understand the barriers faced by women in the community and address them accordingly (Ahmed, 2019).
- **Promote women's participation in decision-making:** Ensure women are facilitated by giving them space so they can talk about their needs and vulnerabilities openly, particularly topics that are culturally sensitive. The plans should address strategies related to minimising gender-based

violence by setting up safe shelters and providing legal and psychological support (Ali et al., 2021). Women should also be provided separate identity and registration cards to ensure their access to resources (Jafree, 2023)

- **Strengthen community-based disaster management:** Involve women in disaster management traineeship programs and train them for leadership roles in disaster risk reduction efforts (Ahmed, 2019; Rahman et al., 2015). Moreover, community-level family group sessions should be conducted to give environmental education and prepare them for disaster mitigation strategies (Jafree, 2023)
- **Equitable distribution of relief aid:** Implementation of transparent distribution of relief aid packages among women, ensuring their safety and privacy and addressing their specific health requirements (Ali et al., 2021). Special measures should be taken considering the constraints that hinder their access to resources in general settings as well (Ali et al., 2021).
- **Enhance risk assessment:** The key disaster personnel should be trained and upskilled through capacity-building programs for enhanced disaster risk assessment (Ahmed, 2019). Training programs should be conducted on the relevant data collection of disaster impacts to compare mortality rates and other factors among men and women that would be beneficial to form inclusive plans (Ali et al., 2021).
- **Coordinated efforts among agencies:** Non-governmental organisations should be involved in the formulation of disaster mitigation strategies to develop more inclusive strategies and make sure the policies are effectively implemented through regular monitoring and feedback (Ahmed, 2019).

Conclusion

Given the country's high susceptibility to disaster, gender-inclusive disaster management policies are crucial. Historical data highlights the disproportionate impacts of these disasters on women, exacerbated by existing gender inequalities and cultural norms. Learning from countries like Bangladesh and Japan that have successfully integrated gender inclusivity into their approaches shows the benefits of involving women in decision-making, early warning training systems, and tailored educational initiatives, making sure their needs are met during crises. Despite Pakistan's effort to develop comprehensive disaster management plans, there are still significant gaps, particularly in strategic focus, community involvement, policy implementation, and gender inclusivity. To address these issues, a multifaceted approach is required, including the active participation of women, consideration of religio-cultural context, equitable relief aid distribution efforts, and enhanced coordination among government agencies and NGOs. By making these changes, Pakistan can enhance its disaster preparedness, response, and recovery process, ensuring all citizens are supported, especially vulnerable ones. This approach will not only improve disaster resilience but will also contribute to the overall well-being of the community and the sustainable development of the country.

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