



WOMEN AT FRONTLINE DURING THE FLOOD CATASTROPHE: A CASE STUDY FROM PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of women before and during the flood crisis in a traditional setup where strong gender norms exist. It has been argued that as women and men perceive risks differently, therefore they act differently during and after natural calamities, even switching roles at the time of need. It has been observed that strong social bonds and networks that exist in most rural communities enable flood victims to save lives and assets on a self-help basis. Our field study, conducted to assess these roles, finds that men make decisions about coping strategies while women's voices remain unheard. Further, from focused group discussions we found that at the time of floods, due to the emotional attachment of women with their assets and belongings (notably dowry) and houses, they chose to stay put till the strong water-currents arrive, consequently placing the lives of the whole family and assets at risk. Our study also sheds light on the survivors' temporary stay in relief camps during the crisis and women's awareness and knowledge of preventive health measures and safety-breaching acts. This study, thus, suggests a need for intervention programmes through which awareness can be created among women to play a more constructive role before and during floods to seek maximum possible safety.

Keywords

Flood crisis & women, women's empowerment, under-developed society