

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC LIVES IN PAKISTAN WITH ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES

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Received: 30 April, 2024

Revised: 30 May, 2024

Accepted: 09, June, 2024

Published: 22 June, 2024

ABSTRACT

Climate change is the environmental issue in Pakistan that affected her in many key areas; Pakistan face challenges like floods, droughts and extreme heatwave due to global warming. The victims in Pakistan are both genders but the women is struggling a lot due to climate change their social, political and economic life has been disturbed whether the women is rural or urban. Women's face challenges of economical and socially as well as their health issues and the women harassment are also a critical issue that generates due to climate change during disasters and post-disaster time period. The research is conducted to highlight the gender discrimination due to climate change and drastic measures that should be taken to overcome the problem. The research employs a secondary source and descriptive technique to comprehensively understand the effects of climate change on women. A qualitative method technique analysis is used to utilised to identify and elucidate crucial key findings.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Floods, Climate discrimination, famine responsibilities, displacement.

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is a significant global threat that is currently causing extensive impacts across the globe. Owing to its geographical location, Pakistan faces a heightened vulnerability to the effects of climate change, with a higher likelihood of suffering more significant temperature rises than the global average. Pakistan, being a developing country, lacks the necessary knowledge, infrastructure, and technology to effectively deal with and recover from the impacts of natural disasters. According to the 'climate risk index' developed by German watch, an independent organisation dedicated to development and the environment, Pakistan has been classified as the top country most severely affected by catastrophic weather disasters. Local environmentalists have observed that almost half of Pakistan's population comprises women, who are already facing an unequal share of the impact of climate change. Around 70 percent of women from the underprivileged population are deemed to have an elevated susceptibility to environmental damage. (Gah, n.d.). The sixth assessment report by the

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) highlights that South Asia is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The region is projected to face increasingly severe weather events, such as heatwaves and flash floods, in the next few decades. These events will have significant repercussions for populations that are already disadvantaged and marginalised (Ebrahim, 2023).

The limited societal position and lack of autonomy experienced by women in Pakistan has exacerbated their difficulties in dealing with climate-induced catastrophic occurrences. Climate change affects all aspects of women's lives, including their financial stability, marital dynamics, and overall physical health. In August 2022, Pakistan experienced a severe monsoon season, leading to severe floods that caused massive damage and the displacement of 8.2 million people. Climate change was the cause of the floods, as the monsoon was unusually intense and arrived early. The disasters affected men and women differently, with the impacts even more severe for young people. Gender-based violence (GBV)

increased during disasters, with women and girls facing sexual exploitation to get basic necessities like food and housing. Reduced access to resources and income led to greater suffering for women, who often shoulder these tasks. Girls may have to leave school to help at home, while families facing financial hardship may marry off their daughters to secure money and security. Climate migration also affected community support programmes for women and girls, disrupting medical, legal, and psychological aid. Shelters for displaced people can be overcrowded, poorly lit, and lack gender-specific spaces, increasing the risk of GBV. The destruction of many healthcare facilities made it difficult for women and girls to access reproductive health services like contraception and maternity care. The trauma of losing homes and livelihoods, combined with poor conditions in camps, significantly affects the mental health of displaced women and girls. Lack of gender-segregated bathrooms, sanitary conditions, and menstrual hygiene products add to their anxiety. The floods disrupted education, damaging or destroying over 26,000 schools and affecting about 3.5 million children, particularly girls. These issues need urgent attention and action to support those most affected and prevent future severe impacts. (Bassey & Nath, 2024)

According to the United Nations, over 80% of individuals who are forced to leave their homes due to climate change are women. Due to the floods that occurred last year, about 650,000 pregnant women in Pakistan were unable to receive healthcare and were compelled to give birth outdoors. The persistent floods have also deprived eight million girls and women of essential menstrual hygiene products and proper sanitation facilities to regulate their menstrual cycle. Gender-based violence is worsening due to climate crises, leading to a surge in child marriages when girls are exchanged for food during climate-induced starvation worldwide. Climate change is not solely an environmental occurrence; it is also a crisis of social injustice that exacerbates pre-existing inequalities within communities. Any conversation on climate change is considered tokenistic and fruitless unless it specifically tackles the challenges faced by women in climate emergencies. (waheed, 2023)

Approximately 49% of Pakistan's population consists of women. According to the 2012-2013 Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey, the male to female ratio is approximately 102 males for every

100 females. This underscores the significance of enabling women in domains such as education, work, and political and social spheres. Deprived of empowerment, women are vulnerable to even slight modifications. The recent floods in Pakistan have led to a severe humanitarian crisis, disproportionately affecting women and girls. The damage to communication networks, roads, and bridges has hampered women's access to essential healthcare services, increasing their risk of abuse, violence, and neglect. Factors such as socio-economic status, caste, age, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, and nationality further exacerbate these issues. Women, particularly those of childbearing age, face acute challenges, including food insecurity, physical weakness, and maternal health risks due to severe food shortages. The crisis has also led to increased pregnancy complications and unsafe birthing conditions.

The floods have also led to displacement, forcing many women to seek refuge in unsafe environments, exposing them to sexual abuse and violence. This has raised concerns about sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies.

Moreover, displaced women face the responsibility of caring for their families, with compromised privacy and conditions for breastfeeding leading many to discontinue breastfeeding due to stress and unhygienic conditions. This shift towards formula feeding, provided through humanitarian aid, introduces additional health risks for infants and young children in these vulnerable settings. Urgent and comprehensive humanitarian assistance is needed to address the needs and vulnerabilities of women affected by the floods in Pakistan. Empowering women in disaster response efforts is crucial for mitigating the long-term impacts of the crisis and fostering resilience within affected communities. Sarmad Muhammad Soomar et al. (2023)

Research Questions

- 1** What are the challenges that women face during disaster and post-disaster time period ?
- 2.** How does gender inequality worsen the impact of climate change on women's social, political and economic life?
- 3.**What is the specific impact of climate change on women's economic chances in Pakistan?

Theoretical Framework

Ecofeminism is a feminist branch that explores the interrelationships between women and the natural world. The term was coined in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne, a French feminist. Ecofeminism incorporates fundamental feminist principles such as gender equality, the recognition of non-patriarchal or nonlinear systems, and an appreciation for organic processes, interconnectedness, and the value of intuition and collaboration. Ecofeminism incorporates a dedication to the environment and a recognition of the connections established between women and nature. This worldview specifically highlights the treatment of both nature and women within a patriarchal (or male-centered) society. Ecofeminists analyse the impact of gender classifications to illustrate how societal standards exert unfair control over women and the environment. The philosophy also argues that these rules result in an inadequate understanding of the universe, and its proponents promote an alternative perspective that regards the environment as sacred, acknowledges humanity's reliance on the natural world, and appreciates the worth of all living beings. (Miles, 2018)

Literature review

Climate change in Pakistan is posing significant challenges to women, affecting their livelihoods, health, and overall well-being. Women often face limited economic opportunities, particularly in rural areas, such as cotton pickers in Sindh's cotton industry. Natural disasters like floods disproportionately affect women, causing them to struggle to access maternal healthcare due to damaged facilities. Social norms also hinder women from migrating to safer areas, increasing risks during disasters. Women also face gender-based violence, including domestic abuse and sexual violence, which worsens during crises. Recurrent droughts in regions like Sindh and Baluchistan exacerbate food insecurity and water scarcity, affecting women and children the most. (Khalil, 2023). Climate change is also created hurdles for women on regarding their socially political and economic life.

There also many case studies conducted by interviews as the case study of Sajida which is written by UNICEF. Sajida, a flood survivor, recounts her experiences during the 2022 floods in Pakistan, including a 15-day period of starvation and a family contracting Malaria. She struggles with her

academic performance and financial struggles, unable to continue her studies. Her family's residence in Sindh province was completely inundated, and she faced a long search for a new place to live. Her ambition to become a doctor was hindered by poverty and climate disasters, leading her to become a refugee. Sajida is among the 33 million Pakistani individuals affected by the floods, losing their lives, homes, and livelihoods. She fears that the floods may recur in the future, further obstructing her aspirations. These firsthand experiences highlight the significant impact of climate disasters on women and girls due to their socio-economic vulnerabilities. These experiences are often overlooked in news headlines, but they highlight the need for greater attention to the impact of climate change on women and girls. Research gap is the Women experience persistent abuse, especially in times of calamity and aftermath. This raises the question of how climate change contributes to the problem on their social, political and economic lives.

Research Methodology

Due to the unavailability of data from the primary source, the research was conducted using secondary methods. Furthermore, there is a lack of detailed research on this issue. However, obtaining data from various websites of reputable organizations, including UNICEF, provided valuable insights regarding this matter. The research utilizes a descriptive approach by employing a qualitative method of analysis.

Climate change and women living in rural and urban areas

Pakistan is significantly impacted by climate change, resulting in devastating consequences such as floods, cyclones, glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs), cloudbursts, decreased food availability, coastal encroachment, and water scarcity. These influences have varied effects on males and females. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) asserts that around 70% of the global impoverished population comprises women, and climate change is exacerbating their circumstances. Pakistan is experiencing significant impacts from climate change, particularly in the agricultural sector, which has a direct and adverse effect on rural women. These women frequently endure extensive journeys to obtain water, and as water supplies diminish, their daily schedules are interrupted. Rural

women face additional difficulties in managing these concerns due to socioeconomic and political obstacles, cultural conventions, and limited knowledge. Urban women are also experiencing hardship. During the 2015 heatwave in Karachi, around 1,200 individuals perished as a result of dehydration and heat strokes. There is a comparable danger this year. The research titled "Karachi 2015 Heat Wave: A Visual Guide" by LEAD Pakistan and Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) provides recommendations for managing heatwaves. Some recommendations include refraining from engaging in physically demanding activities, selecting suitable footwear, consuming cooling herbs such as chrysanthemum tea, consuming small and frequent meals, avoiding diets that are heavy in protein, and applying cold water to the wrists to lower body temperature.

Case study of rural Sindh:

The study conducted by the Social Policy and Development Sector (SPDC), titled "Gender and Social Vulnerability to Climate Change – A Study of Disaster-Prone Areas in Sindh," sheds light on the impact of shifting weather patterns on rural women in Sindh.

In Dadu District due to the decline in fish population, women who previously engaged in fishing and net weaving are now deprived of these activities. Currently, they are primarily limited to household duties. In addition, alterations in weather patterns have diminished agricultural output, thereby restricting the involvement of women in farming. Similarly, in Tharparkar the problem of water scarcity is significant in this location. Women dedicate approximately five hours each day to retrieving water from remote wells, which frequently lacks potability, resulting in the spread of waterborne illnesses. Transporting cumbersome water containers might lead to bodily ailments such as alopecia. Abubakar (n.d.)

Climate Change and Its Socioeconomic Impact on Women in Pakistan's Informal Settlements

A multitude of causes are causing significant hardships for working-class individuals residing in informal settlements in Pakistan. The floods that occurred last year resulted in substantial destruction, while inflation reached 27.4% in August, leading to an increase in the cost of goods and services. In July, the currency had a 6.2% decrease in value, and the

economic situation has been aggravated by political instability. Moreover, the escalating costs of food, petrol, and energy have further plunged them into destitution. Women encounter distinct obstacles in such situations. Rakhi Matan, a 35-year-old resident of Shirin Jinnah Colony in Karachi, is employed as a domestic worker in Clifton. She leads a busy life and has very little personal time, only finding respite when she goes to sleep. During power outages, males are allowed to exit their residences, while females are required to remain indoors and prepare meals under low illumination provided by their mobile devices, regardless of the discomfort caused by high temperatures.

Rahat Shah, a 37-year-old mother of ten residing in a three-room leased residence in Gulshan-e-Sikandarabad, expresses dissatisfaction with the requirement to wear cumbersome attire (purdah) during hot weather, while males have the freedom to wear lightweight garments. Her son, who is 22 years old, holds the belief that men should be responsible for outdoor tasks while women should take care of household responsibilities. He disregards household chores as "feminine responsibilities" and does not contribute to them. Ebrahim (2023)

Violence against women in the context of climate change and migration.

According to the United Nations, violence against women is defined as any type of violence that is based on gender and results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm, and may also involve restricting their freedom. The occurrence of this violence is associated with disparities in gender and instability in the environment, which have negative impacts on the overall well-being of communities and impede progress and growth. Approximately one-third of women worldwide encounter gender-based violence, resulting in pervasive discrimination and a tendency to normalise violence as an inherent aspect of their lives.

Pakistan's climate and topography are highly diverse, ranging from tropical to temperate regions. The country has experienced a gradual increase in annual mean temperatures since 1900, with projections suggesting further increases in the 2020s, 2.5°C in the 2050s, and potentially 4.5°C by the 2080s under extreme climate change scenarios. Monsoon season precipitation has increased by 15 to 25 percent in northern Pakistan, while southern regions have experienced slight decreases.

Pakistan's diverse geography influences internal migration patterns, which are primarily economic responses to regional disparities in development and resource availability. There is limited research on the relationship between climate change and migration in Pakistan, but recent evidence suggests that environmental changes, including climate variability and extreme weather events, contribute to rural-urban migration and displacement. Regions vulnerable to climate impacts, such as flooding, erratic precipitation, droughts, and rising temperatures, often witness increased migration as a coping strategy. These pressures can drive people to migrate in search of better livelihood opportunities or to escape environmental hazards. (Farah et al., 2023)

Domestic violence, which includes dowry violence, remains a prevalent problem as a result of women's economic marginalisation and unequal treatment in the face of climate disasters. Climate change presents substantial concerns, especially in South Asian nations, such as shortages of food and water, displacement, and health issues. The IPCC documents substantial population movements resulting from erosion, flooding, agricultural disturbance, and water scarcity. The World Health Organisation (WHO) cautions that women are particularly susceptible during catastrophes, facing heightened rates of sexual and domestic violence, which can have significant implications for their reproductive and sexual well-being. During the 2005 Kashmir earthquake, teenage girls were subjected to harassment. Violence against women after a disaster is widespread because of their assigned tasks and duties, which can be worsened by ongoing prejudice and unemployment, resulting in significant psychological strain and a higher likelihood of experiencing depression. These factors contribute to the susceptibility of women to domestic violence. The occurrence of emotional, physical, and sexual violence against women during and after natural disasters is significant and frequently disregarded. Women in Pakistani society frequently take on the responsibility of being the main carers and breadwinners, resulting in significant feelings of guilt and stress due to their inability to meet their families' fundamental requirements. The limited availability of water for crucial activities such as cooking and washing intensifies instances of domestic violence against women perpetrated by their partners or other members of their household. The loss of loved ones during disasters has a

substantial impact on women's emotional well-being and can potentially result in depression, particularly in rural regions with inadequate knowledge and assistance for mental health concerns.

In traditional societies such as Sindh, cultural conventions mandate that women maintain their modesty by wearing veils and staying inside the confines of their homes. Consequently, they endure stress due to the absence of seclusion and the scrutiny of unfamiliar men, particularly in times of calamity. The act of relocating individuals to communal shelters exposes them to stress due to the absence of privacy and the presence of strange men, which further undermines their mental well-being. In rural Pakistani contexts, physical violence is commonly accepted as normal, and women who have been uprooted by catastrophes frequently experience violent behaviour from their spouses. This acceptance originates from ingrained social standards where male hegemony and female subservience are perceived as inherent. The vulnerability of women and girls in drought-affected areas has led to an increase in physical violence, such as physical assault, particularly during duties like water gathering.

Sexual abuse in disaster shelters and camps is a troubling fact for women, although it is often not reported owing to the stigma and fear of damaging family reputation. Insufficient gender-sensitive amenities and privacy in shelters leave women and girls vulnerable to sexual harassment and attack by male residents. The occurrence of disasters also leads to an escalation in the trafficking of women and children, taking advantage of their heightened vulnerability. Ultimately, climate change intensifies many manifestations of violence against women both during and after calamities. To tackle these problems, it is necessary to implement gender-sensitive strategies in crisis management, establish secure environments, and enable women to assert their rights and obtain assistance when necessary. (Memon, 2020)

Major Challenges

Climate change poses significant threats to women in Pakistan due to social, economic, and cultural factors. Women, particularly in rural areas, live in poverty and rely heavily on local natural resources for survival. They are often excluded from decision-making processes and environmental management benefits, making it difficult for them to cope with

climate change impacts. Women also face mobility and safety issues due to sociocultural norms and childcare responsibilities, forcing them to travel further for basic needs. Climate change exacerbates these issues, increasing women's vulnerability to domestic abuse, human trafficking, and sexual violence during crises.

Health challenges are also significant in rural Pakistan. Women cannot access resources to mitigate extreme heat, leading to severe back pain, headaches, and hair loss from carrying heavy water pots. Climate change acts as a stress multiplier, making it harder for women to cope with health issues, especially without effective government policies. These challenges highlight the need for comprehensive policies and strategies to address climate change and ensure the well-being of women in Pakistan. (Saif & Raza, 2022)

The agriculture sector in Pakistan is encountering significant challenges due to climate change, namely in the form of intense floods. The floods have caused extensive damage to agricultural land, namely cotton crops, resulting in a significant impact on 65% of women of working age employed in this industry. Women frequently face a lack of land ownership, limited access to financial resources, and a lack of knowledge about contemporary farming techniques, which increases their vulnerability in terms of their livelihoods. In addition, people frequently lack awareness regarding the consequences of climate change on their occupations and everyday existence, resulting in additional financial decline and scarcity of food. The World Bank cautions that the floods have the potential to drive 6 to 9 million individuals into poverty, with women and girls being disproportionately impacted. The enduring consequences of this predicament will exacerbate their struggle to break free from poverty and enhance their livelihoods. (Emma Roquel, 2022)

Anecdotes illustrating difficulties

Sonia Arif, a 40-year-old beautician and mother of four, embodies the challenges faced by numerous women grappling with multiple issues. Following the closure of her husband's tailoring shop due to their inability to finance the rent, their circumstances became extremely challenging. A campaign in 2021 to remove unauthorized structures from the Gujjar Nala stormwater drain led to the demolition of their Kausar Niazi Colony residence. People held the obstructed stream responsible for the urban floods in

2020, deeming them a climate-induced calamity. Sonia and her family currently reside in leased housing, facing difficulties meeting their basic needs due to the oppressive heat and financial burden.

Likewise, Rakhi Matan, a 35-year-old domestic maid, faces persistent power outages in her locality. In contrast to men, who have the freedom to leave their residences during periodic power outages, women are obligated to remain indoors and go on with their household tasks, often in uncomfortable and oppressive circumstances. Rakhi's experiences illustrate the gender-specific limitations that worsen the effects of climate change on women. Rahat Shah, a mother of ten residing in a three-room leased dwelling, discusses the extra weight women bear as a result of societal conventions. In her Pashtun culture, women must comply with strict dress codes, even during extreme heat, leading to increased discomfort in their daily activities. The constricting attire, along with the requirement to remain indoors, contributes to the physical and psychological strain that women experience.

The impact of climate change on economic stability is significant

The region, encompassing Karachi, is extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change, such as heatwaves and floods. The severe weather conditions give rise to hazardous and unwholesome living situations, especially for women, who are already limited by traditional conventions. During heatwaves, the absence of adequate ventilation in densely populated informal settlements transforms houses into blazing infernos. The floods exacerbate living conditions by disseminating water-borne illnesses as a result of insufficient sewerage systems, impacting youngsters, and augmenting the caregiving responsibility of women. Economic factors exacerbate these issues., Due to rampant inflation, a devaluing currency, and political turmoil, the prices of necessary commodities such as food, gasoline, and fuel have risen significantly. Families like Sonia's experience poverty exacerbated by economic hardship, making it more challenging to manage the additional challenges posed by climate change.

The daily challenges and their impact on mental well-being are a topic of interest. Women in these regions must cope with the absence of dependable energy and water provisions. Tasks such as gathering firewood in the absence of gas add to their burden

and anxiety. For example, Rakhi dedicates one hour to gathering wood, which has a short lifespan, emphasizing the extra effort women must put in to secure their families' survival. The topic of mental health is of utmost importance. The ongoing stress of performing daily tasks in difficult circumstances, along with societal demands, significantly affects women's well-being. Regrettably, Pakistan fails to give importance to mental health, resulting in a lack of essential help for these women.

Women in Karachi's informal settlements, already burdened by economic, social, and cultural disparities, face intensified challenges due to climate change. Their narratives exemplify the profound consequences of extreme weather phenomena on their livelihoods, exacerbated by gender-related limitations and financial burdens. To tackle these obstacles, it is necessary to adopt a holistic approach that recognizes and deals with the distinct difficulties encountered by these susceptible women. Z. Ebrahim (2023)

Recommendations:

The National Climate Change Policy in Pakistan should be employed to tackle the distinct difficulties encountered by women as a result of climate change, specifically the consequences of climate-induced migration. It is important to include women's perspectives in decision-making and implementation processes for adaption techniques that take into account gender sensitivity. The prioritisation of women's empowerment advocacy should be directed at those individuals who are most impacted by climate change. The Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) is tasked with implementing strategies to mitigate the susceptibility of women to disasters, particularly following the eighteenth amendment to Pakistan's Constitution.

The purpose of Gender and Child Protection Cells within PDMA's is to provide assistance to marginalised populations during emergencies and facilitate voluntary migration. Understanding gender disparities is essential for the effectiveness of national adaption programmes. Government policies should empower women by granting them the authority to make decisions on the management of climate change impacts, instead of exclusively entrusting these decisions to men.

It is crucial to collaborate closely with both local and global non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that

are already engaged in tackling climate change challenges in Pakistan in order to build effective policies. It is essential for the implications of climate change that are not anticipated to be understood by the local community, especially women who are disproportionately impacted.

Pakistan's adaptation initiatives should embrace a holistic approach, dismantling cultural obstacles and enhancing prospects for livelihoods, while also addressing gender concerns with care. Climate change has a direct and indirect impact on women, causing them to remain stuck in cycles of poverty, gender discrimination, and heightened vulnerability. The State should prioritise highlighting the correlation between climate change and women in its adaptation strategies, recognising the issue not only from a legal standpoint but also from a moral and ethical perspective, given the significant and unjust consequences faced by women. (Saif & Raza, 2022)

Addressing and resolving the issue of gender violence is a crucial step towards achieving the fundamental purpose of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Women's participation and acknowledgment are essential for the development of more robust resilience mechanisms and improved catastrophe preparedness. To cultivate a gender-sensitive approach, planners must acknowledge and embrace the fundamental distinctions and concerns that underlie the experiences of each gender. (Memon, 2020)

Conclusion:

Climate change proved Vulnerable to women; the time period during disasters and post-disasters are challenging for them. Their socially, political and Economic Life has changed due to climate change because it impacts all on them. The key finding is that the role of government is less than expected because of lack of women participation in decision making in Climate change policies. Women should have separate shelter homes during disasters with proper availability of sanitation and government should collaborate with local NGOs and allocate funds and the most important factor is preparedness and it need to work on this factor as well. The women violence is the question mark on the Government during floods and essential law making is the need of time related to this issue. Omens economical life has changed a lot especially rural women's because they were rely on agricultural sector for the financial matters and climate change hurt this thing most. So,

government should provide the funds and loans and enhanced agricultural benefits to equally benefit both genders.

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