

EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES FACED BY FEMALE SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN FLOOD RECOVERY EFFORTS IN DISTRICT SHAHEED BENAZIRABAD

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the barriers faced by female secondary school teachers in District Shaheed Benazirabad during flood recovery efforts after the catastrophic floods of 2022. This study was qualitative by method and exploratory by purpose. Data was collected through four focus group discussions with 32 female teachers. 32 participants were randomly distributed into four groups. Thematic analysis was done through NVivo software. According to the participants, societal norms, safety concerns, lack of institutional support and scarcity of resources were noted as potential barriers. These barriers can be addressed by arranging targeted interventions including arranging safe transportation options, appropriate resource allocation, and organising training programs. Stakeholders can improve the contributions of female teachers to community resilience during recovery efforts by nurturing a supportive environment and recognising the important roles female teachers can take during disaster management.

Keywords: Female Teachers, Flood Recovery, Barriers, Gender Inequality, Disaster Management

INTRODUCTION

Over the past years, a surge in conflicts and natural disasters has been noted. According to Rahman, Khan, & Shaw (2015), climate-related disasters have impacted an estimated 2.6 billion people between 1999 and 2009. The most recent example of such disasters is the floods of 2022 which were particularly devastating as they affected approximately 33 million people and resulted in widespread destruction of infrastructure, homes, and livelihoods (United Nations, 2022). Variable impacts of these floods are evident by the fact that these disproportionately impacted women and children due to existing socioeconomic inequalities and cultural norms that limit their mobility and access to resources (Peterson, 2018). The outlook for the coming years is also concerning as according to the World Bank

(2019), Pakistan ranks fifth on the Global Climate Risk Index, highlighting its vulnerability to climate change and associated impacts. According to UNOCHA data, 1.3 million people require humanitarian assistance, which includes 4.1 million women and girls of reproductive age; 1.2 million women and girls in hard-to-reach besieged areas; 1.6 million internally displaced women and girls; 360,000 pregnant women; and 2.5 million youth (ASEAN, 2009).

In the resulting events due to flooding, female teachers can play an important role in supporting young individuals experiencing trauma. They can assist their students throughout all the phases of disaster preparedness, response, and recovery (Mutch, 2014). However, the participation of female

teachers in flood recovery initiatives is not free from significant barriers which hamper their effective engagement. Therefore, this study was aimed at identifying the barriers faced by female secondary school teachers in District Shaheed Benazirabad during flood recovery efforts. It was hoped that the identification of these barriers could be helpful in policy decisions and in promoting gender equity within disaster management activities. The study objective is given below:

1. To identify the barriers that female teachers face in participating in flood recovery activities.

The following research questions were used to achieve the above objective:

RQ1: What are the barriers female teachers face when participating in flood recovery activities?

RQ2: What specific societal norms hinder the involvement of female teachers in flood recovery activities?

RQ3: What kind of support (from community, government and NGOs) is needed to mitigate the barriers faced by female teachers?

Materials and Methods

Data for this exploratory qualitative study was collected through four focus group discussions with each FGD consisting of eight participants and according to Morgan (1997), this sample size is appropriate. To guide the FGDs a semi-structured interview protocol was designed. To

ensure sufficient diversity of opinion, 32 female secondary school teachers from various schools in District Shaheed Benazirabad were recruited. These teachers were selected using purposive sampling due to their relevant experience and ability to provide rich information about barriers they faced during the community recovery efforts following the floods. All focus groups were organised in a neutral location like a local school to ensure accessibility for all participants. FGDs were organised at times and dates convenient for participants according to their schedules. Additionally, the aim of the study was explained and an informed consent ensuring participants their anonymity and confidentiality was signed by each participant. The duration of each focus group was between 90 and 120 minutes (and was facilitated by a moderator who was familiar with the local context and also ensured a comfortable environment that encouraged open dialogue among participants). An assistant moderator (observer), was also hired to take notes during the discussions and to make sure that the moderator did not overlook any participants trying to add comments. All the focus group discussions were also audiotaped with the permission of the participants so that accurate data capture was ensured. Thematic analysis was done with NVivo Software. Details on the demographic characteristics of the participants are given in the below table.

Table: Details on demographic information

Demographic Characteristic	Category	No. of participants
Gender	Female	32
Occupation	Secondary School Teachers	32
Location	District Shaheed Benazirabad	32
Experience	Relevant Experience of participating in flood recovery initiatives	32
Teaching Experience	1-5 years	8
	6-10 years	20
	Over 11 years	4
Age Range	20-30 years	4
	31-40 years	24

	41-50 years	4
Educational Qualifications	Bachelor's Degree	15
	Master's Degree	17
School Type	Public Schools	32

Limitations

Like other studies, this study is also not free from limitations which could include bias because purposive sampling was used to select respondents. Another limitation may be socially desirable answers instead of true feelings or experiences to avoid criticism from the public. Finally, the findings may lack generalizability having been conducted with respondents from only one district. Findings should be discussed and interpreted keeping in mind these potential limitations.

Findings

In the following section, a research questions-wise analysis of the barriers faced by female teachers in participating in flood recovery initiatives is detailed.

RQ1: What are the barriers female teachers face when participating in flood recovery activities?

According to participants, there are many barriers faced by female teachers when participating in flood recovery efforts and initiatives. Among them, lack of resources and support received from the local authorities was a common theme as one teacher narrated: "We want to help, but are unable to do so as no materials or funds are available so that we can organize anything." A broader issue is highlighted in the above sentiment and female teachers have a feeling of being under-resourced with no support received in their efforts to contribute to recovery initiatives. The crushing workload was another important barrier as mentioned by the female teachers especially when schools are interrupted. In the words of a participant: "After the floods have gone, we had to manage not only our homes along with families but also had to teach. It's gruelling." These dual burdens also have a limiting impact on their capacity to engage to

their full potential in recovery efforts. Furthermore, bureaucratic hurdles are another challenge that can hamper the participation of female teachers according to some respondents as one teacher remarked: "Many a time getting permission from higher authorities to take any action can take weeks." This delayed approval of permission can be detrimental especially when immediate action is required for effective recovery.

RQ2: What specific societal norms hinder the involvement of female teachers in flood recovery activities?

According to the analysis of the focus group discussions, societal norms also pose a significant hindrance to the involvement of female teachers in flood recovery initiatives. Many participants voiced their apprehensions regarding the cultural expectations which command the caregivers' roles of women rather than community leaders as one teacher shared: "Expectation of people from us is to stay home to take care of our families; they don't want to see us as in leadership roles." This sentiment also hampers their opportunities for engaging actively in disaster recovery efforts. Quite a few expressed fears related to safety. Many respondents felt insecure while visiting relief camps or community gatherings. One respondent went on to say, "I fear my safety while going out to help flood-affected people as harassment cases have been reported. "Such fear might prevent women from participating in recovery efforts, making them increasingly alienated in decision-making activities within their communities. Some participants underscored that societal attitudes towards women who are leading public initiatives can contribute to their reluctance to become at the forefront as one teacher articulated: "Whenever I try to arrange anything, people always object to my authority

considering that I am a woman". A hostile environment is created by such societal pressures wherein female teachers feel discouraged and avoid taking initiative.

RQ3: What kind of support (from community, government and NGOs) is needed to mitigate the barriers faced by female teachers?

The participants were asked about the kind of support required to overcome these barriers and challenges. The respondents emphasized that the community and institutional backing should be there to overcome such challenges and barriers. Participants also suggested that the local authorities should not only provide more resources but also arrange for the training of female teachers who are involved in disaster recovery initiatives. One teacher articulated: "We will feel more equipped while helping our communities if workshops on leadership and disaster management activities are undertaken". Such pieces of training will help empower female teachers and enhance their effectiveness during recovery efforts.

According to many participants, there is a strong need for safe transportation facilities for travelling to community work. As one respondent articulated: "If safe transportation is provided to us it will make us feel more comfortable and we will also enable us to help affected people more effectively." It means if safety concerns of female teachers are addressed by providing logistic support it may help in mustering greater participation of female teachers. According to many participants, a stronger collaboration between schools and NGOs working on disaster recovery efforts is also needed. One teacher narrated: "Partnership with NGOs could enhance our reach to more families waiting for help during disaster recovery." Ensuring such partnerships may mean enhancing the availability of resources and providing female teachers with the tools which are considered necessary for engaging meaningfully in recovery efforts. Finally, the participants also

emphasized the need for arranging community awareness programs with a major focus on modifying societal perceptions about the roles of women during disasters. One teacher stated: "We need to make people understand that women are equally able to lead and it is also equally essential for the recovery of our community". Arranging awareness initiatives for creating awareness may help in modifying cultural attitudes about empowering female teachers by converting them into key contributors to effective disaster recovery. In these findings, it is underscored that multiple barriers are faced by female secondary school teachers of District Shaheed Benazirabad when they attempt to take part in flood recovery initiatives.

Conclusion

This study explored the barriers faced by female secondary school teachers in District Shaheed Benazirabad during flood recovery efforts after the catastrophic floods of 2022. According to findings, a range of barriers are faced by female teachers. Safety concerns, limited resources, and societal norms are barriers faced by female teachers. Moreover, to mitigate the impacts of these barriers, support could be gathered from stakeholders including local authorities, NGOs, and community engagement. Mitigation of these barriers will not only enhance the effectiveness of recovery initiatives but will also promote gender equity within the community.

Recommendations

- Community awareness programs on gender equity should be organized.
- Organizing Pieces of training on disaster management, leadership skills, and community mobilization for female teachers.
- Safe transportation options should be established for female teachers.

- Educational materials, financial support, and access to mental health resources should be increased for female teachers.
- Strong partnerships between schools and NGOs should be fostered.

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