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Women Empowerment: A Key to Mitigating Disaster Impacts in Pakistan

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Abstract:

This study seeks to understand women's engagement in disaster management in Pakistan and strategies that can be used to improve their involvement in disaster risk reduction processes. Concentration is given to the problems faced by women and steps that can be taken to solve the problem. This study employs focus group discussions and policy document reviews to identify the factors influencing women in disaster management. The study also examined existing policies to determine their relevance in responding to gender-related issues. The study argues that cultural values, resource constraints, and gender violence are major impediments to women's involvement in disaster management. These measures include targeted capacity building, community mobilization efforts, and campaigning for policy reforms that are friendly to women. The implications of the present study are relevant to policymakers and disaster management practitioners by offering guidelines to improve gender-sensitive disaster management strategies for affected communities. The recommendation section of this study enhances women's engagement in disaster risk reduction processes in Pakistan. Therefore, this study contributes to knowledge by revealing the impact of policy implementation that marginalizes local women's leadership and contextual knowledge. It also has unique approaches, such as the development of a mentorship model and improving sensitization measures to expand women's engagement in disaster risk management.

Keywords: women empowerment, disaster management, Pakistan, gender-sensitive policies, community engagement

妇女赋权：减轻巴基斯坦灾害影响的关键

摘要：

本研究旨在探讨巴基斯坦女性在灾害管理中的参与情况，并提出提高她们在减灾过程中的参与度的策略。研究重点关注女性所面临的问题以及解决这些问题的措施。研究通过焦点小组讨论和政策文件审查，识别影响女性参与灾害管理的因素。研究还审查了现有政策，以确定其在应对性别相关问题方面的相关性。研究认为，文化价值观、资源限制以及性别暴力是女性参与灾害管理的主要障碍。措施包括针对性的能力建设、社区动员工作，以及推动对女性友好的政策改革。本研究的结果对政策制定者和灾害管理从业

人员具有重要意义，提供了改进性别敏感灾害管理策略的指导。研究的建议部分有助于提高巴基斯坦女性在减灾过程中的参与度。因此，本研究通过揭示政策实施对地方女性领导力及其背景知识的边缘化影响，为知识作出了贡献。同时，本研究提出了一些独特的方法，如导师制模型的开发，以及改进宣传措施，以扩大女性在灾害风险管理中的参与度。

关键词： 妇女赋权, 灾害管理, 巴基斯坦, 性别敏感政策, 社区参与

1. Introduction

Disaster management is a coordinated and organized approach to carrying out activities for the effective response, recovery, prevention, and mitigation of the impact of disasters on people and countries. Disaster management aims to minimize loss of life, minimize damage to infrastructure and properties, and accelerate the process of post-disaster reconstruction. In Pakistan, various types of disasters, such as floods and earthquakes, require disaster management plans and policies at both the government and non-governmental levels, including public awareness and engagement (Ali & Hameed, 2018). Thus, women's participation and involvement are important in this regard, as empowered women play major roles in all aspects of disaster risk reduction and post-disaster rebuilding initiatives (Hosseini et al., 2018). The concept originates from the different philosophical and social approaches and attributes that improve women's participation in decision-making and resource management. Islamic feminism encourages equal status of men and women based on Islamic Shariah laws for women's rights and freedom (Barlas, 2002). In Pakistan, despite the progress made in the context of women's empowerment, socioeconomic vulnerabilities and barriers, cultural factors, and gender discrimination prevent women from actively participating in disaster management (Smith, 2020; Hosseini et al., 2018). It is important to address these challenges to achieve efficient disaster management and gender equality.

Research Problem, Objectives, Rationale and Limitations

1.1 Research Problem

Disaster management also requires the empowerment of women; however, in the context of Pakistan, there are many barriers to empowering women, such as education and employment. These challenges not only affect their own personal and career growth but also prominently affect the nation's disaster preparedness, response, and effectiveness in recovery. All of these obstacles must be addressed to improve the general disaster management capacity of the nation.

1.2 Research Objectives

- a. Examine the factors affecting women's empowerment, particularly in the field of disaster management in Pakistan.
- b. To assess approaches and barriers influencing women's participation in disaster management activities.
- c. To formulate evidence-based recommendations to align women empowerment endeavors and disaster management policies.

1.3 Rationale of the Study

This study seeks to explain the political, cultural, social, economic, and other factors that affect women's participation in disaster management practices. As outlined above, this study aims to determine the possible benefits and improvements in disaster response, recovery, and preparedness through women's empowerment by comparing various approaches at the community, NGO, and government levels. This study aims to examine how women's empowerment relates to disaster management through a critique of policy documents from the National Disaster Management Authority of Pakistan and other related institutions. Through focus groups, document analysis, and literature review, the study obtained qualitative data on women empowerment programs and ways to improve their implementation in the field of disaster management.

1.4 Limitations of the Study

This research might experience some limitations in terms of time and funding, which may affect the focus of the analysis. The overall data on disaster management and women's empowerment in Pakistan are limited and not updated consistently to provide recent information; thus, there is a high dependency on the available information. Since disaster management is a dynamic process, the information that has been gathered in this research can only be useful for a certain period and cannot be used in other countries of the world that have different social and political systems. Further, women's empowerment is an extensive subject; hence, this study will not cover all aspects in detail. Nevertheless, the study may contribute greatly to the existing literature in

conceptualizing and operationalizing the relationship between women's empowerment and disaster management systems in Pakistan, with policy implications for disaster risk reduction and response.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Women Empowerment

Women empowerment encompasses granting women rights, opportunities, and control over their lives to exercise power and make choices across social interactions (Kabeer, 2001). This multifaceted concept includes economic empowerment through access to capital, business ownership, employment prospects, and equal pay, which enhances family income and quality of life. Politically, it involves liberating women from discriminatory practices to engage in politics and governance, supported by laws that facilitate increased female representation (Sen, 2001). Social empowerment addresses cultural norms and stereotypes that restrict women's roles and advocates for gender equality in workplaces, educational institutes, and beyond. Cultural empowerment promotes women's equal participation in arts and customs, fostering confidence and enriching cultural diversity (Sen, 2001).

2.2 Empowerment Theories

Feminist theory encompasses the evolution of women's empowerment, influenced by sociolegal and cultural environments. The First Wave (late 19th to early 20th century) focused on women's suffrage and legal rights, with notable activists such as Emmeline Pankhurst and Susan B. Anthony advocating for political empowerment and achieving milestones such as the 19th Amendment in the US (Kabeer, 2001). The Second Wave (1960s-1980s) extended this scope to issues such as reproductive rights, workplace equality, and cultural changes, marked by key events, such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the establishment of the National Organization for Women (Winkler, 2018). The Third Wave (from the late 20th century onward) emphasizes intersectionality, diversity, and challenging traditional gender norms, leveraging the Internet and social media to amplify feminist voices and address broader issues of identity and representation (Heywood, 2006; Ahmed, 2017). The #MeToo movement, beginning in 2017, further highlighted issues of sexual abuse and harassment, reflecting ongoing challenges, such as the gender wage gap and underrepresentation in leadership roles (Winkler, 2018; Duflo, 2012).

The Capability Approach emphasizes that an individual's well-being is determined by their abilities and real freedom to live a life they value, with a focus

on the diversity of capabilities and the need to tailor empowerment programs to individual needs (Sen, 2001; Nussbaum, 2000). This approach emphasizes the need to consider the conversion factors that hinder women from achieving their fullest potential (Sen, 2001). This highlights the advocacy for social justice and women's rights through the provision of equal opportunities and adequate resources for women to empower and engage them in decision-making (Crenshaw, 1989). By combining these principles, the Capability Approach offers a broad and sound theoretical perspective on women's capability enhancement and the promotion of gender equity in general (Hankivsky et al., 2010).

According to the Social Capital Theory, social networks and community resources empower women through information and support. According to Putnam (2000), there are two types of social capital: bonding, where individuals are closely connected and from the same background, and bridging, where people are connected across the network and professions. Whereas bonding social capital entails care and commitment, bridging social capital provides access to resources and opportunities. These networks can foster women's political, social, and economic engagement, thereby promoting their independence and socioeconomic standing. Real-life scenarios justify the relevance of the theory in bringing about positive changes for women and social capital (Woolcock, 1998).

Ecological Feminism (Ecofeminism) focuses on the relationship between women and nature and argues that both are oppressed by the same patriarchal and hierarchical structures. This theory emphasizes the need to focus on both environmental and gender aspects to build a harmonious society. Language and history have contributed to objectification and subordination of women and nature. The various types of eco-feminism include liberal, cultural, and socialist feminism, which present different views on how the inequality of women and the degradation of the environment can be solved through changes in legislation, cultural analysis, and social transformation. Ecofeminism, therefore, offers a foundation for building a more equitable and environmentally sustainable society by countering oppressive systems (Merchant, 1980; Warren, 1990; Garrard, 2013).

2.3 Disaster Management

Disaster Management comprises of different stages, such as mitigation, preparation, response, and recovery. The mitigation phase in disaster management is important, as it involves preventing or minimizing the effects of disasters by employing measures such as proper planning and construction of structures, protection of the environment, and raising awareness.

These measures are intended to reduce risk and improve the ability to cope with natural disasters. In land use planning, zoning and building codes are used to discourage the construction of buildings in hazardous areas, whereas in infrastructure development, emphasis is placed on strengthening structures and incorporating features that can withstand disasters. Conservation of the environment involves the preservation of natural barriers and species to avoid disasters such as floods and erosion, as well as creating public awareness on disaster risks and preparedness. These are the strategies of disaster management, which constitute a holistic approach towards disaster prevention and management with the goal of protecting people, assets, and the environment (UNDRR, 2017; FEMA, 2015; Hyer, 2015).

Preparation is one of the four stages of disaster management that focuses on ensuring that communities and responders have the necessary tools, knowledge, and resources to respond to emergencies. It encompasses strategic planning, which includes the creation of emergency response and evacuation plans that address specific risks and the needs of certain communities. Training and exercises improve preparedness through the practice of disaster scenarios and familiarization of responders with their tasks. Resource management provides necessary supplies and funds for response efforts at the right time. Awareness creation and warning systems inform people of the potential hazards and measures to be taken to prevent or mitigate the effects of disasters on lives and property (UNDRR, 2017; FEMA, 2015; Coppola, 2015).

The response phase of disaster management involves the provision of basic needs to the affected communities to reduce suffering and loss of lives and property. Some of the activities include search and rescue activities aimed at identifying and assisting victims, evacuation mapping and execution to enhance safety, and provision of medical services to meet the health needs of victims. Law enforcement and emergency services provide order and protection, while clearance of debris and provision of food and water contribute to restoration. Inter-agency cooperation, communication, and efficient mobilization of resources are some of the key factors that determine the effectiveness of disaster response in minimizing the time lag between the occurrence of a disaster and the recovery process (IFRC, 2019; INSARAG, 2019; FEMA, 2015).

Recovery and rehabilitation is the final stage in the disaster management process, which involves the restoration of infrastructure, return to normalcy, and improvement of the ability of the community to cope with future disasters. It seeks to reduce social, economic, and physical losses by evaluating damage, identifying priorities for reconstruction, and engaging the community in decision-making. This phase is

essential for the stabilization and rebuilding process and for promoting sustainable recovery in affected areas (IFRC, 2019; UNDRR, 2017).

2.4 Women's Role in Disaster Management

Women's participation in disaster management is vital as it strengthens community responses and diversity. Female participation in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery, as illustrated by the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004 and the Gorkha Earthquake in Nepal, shows women's leadership in community rebuilding and decision-making. Gender-sensitive disaster management approaches, as advocated by UN Women and national organizations such as WOND in the Philippines and Grassroots Women's Network in Thailand, include training, leadership, and gender-sensitive risks to enhance disaster risk reduction and response. Such actions not only help reduce the effects of disasters but also contribute to sustainable development and gender equality at the local, national, and global levels (Enarson, 2012; UNDRR, 2017; UN Women, 2018; WOND, 2021).

2.5 Bult's Theoretical Framework for Women Empowerment

Bult's (2009) theoretical framework for the nexus of women's empowerment and disaster management provides a structured approach to understanding and promoting women's empowerment across various levels: individual, household, community, and institutional. The framework focuses on power relations to redress the imbalance and promote justice; covers empowerment in legal, political, social, and economic domains; and highlights the context of interventions from the community level to the policy level. When incorporated together, the elements of the framework provide a useful guide for the development and delivery of programs that support women's rights in disaster-affected regions and foster their leadership and capacity in disaster risk management (Bult, 2009).

2.6 Women Empowerment in Disaster Management of Pakistan

In the context of Pakistan, the issues of women's rights and disaster response show the important concerns and risks that women experience, especially after natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes. As a result, disasters make women vulnerable to a lack of resources, healthcare, education, and increased cases of gender-based violence. Cultural barriers and male-dominated societies also limit their engagement in the decision-making and recovery processes. While government and non-governmental organizations have attempted to address this issue, systematic failures in

disaster management still exist, and women's needs are often ignored in emergency relief. The 2005 earthquake and 2010 floods are examples where women due to poor health care, sanitation, and protection needs were at higher risk, and it is therefore important to consider gender issues in disaster risk reduction and management (Ali, 2010; Niazi, 2012; Siddiqui, 2016; Ahmed et al., 2020).

Pakistan is a patriarchal society in which women face social, cultural, and religious barriers, leading to limited opportunities for empowerment. Girls and women are discriminated against in terms of education, employment, voting rights, and health due to unequal gender roles and inadequate resources. There is still inequality in gender; most girls cannot exercise their right to basic and secondary education because of poverty and traditions. Women are discriminated against in the workforce, paid less, and have limited opportunities for career advancement. Gender-based violence is still on the rise because of cultural factors and the lack of proper legislation. There are few women in politics, and their careers are set back by many challenges, such as violence targeting female politicians. Addressing these problems requires significant legal reform, social policy, and economic action in favor of women and their right to equality across various spheres of life (Abbas et al., 2021; Castro, 2015; Khan et al., 2018; Siddiqui et al., 2019).

Gender mainstreaming as an approach has become integral to the disaster management policies governing Pakistan, and the acknowledgement of this approach is reflected in legal and policy frameworks such as the National Disaster Management Act of 2010, National Disaster Risk Management Framework (2013), National Policy Guidelines for Vulnerable Groups in Disasters (2014), and the National Disaster Management Plan in Pakistan (2019-2030). Such measures include assessment of risk by gender, involving women in decision-making processes, protection of women and girls in disasters, empowering women economically, gender sensitization, and education. They emphasize the need for gender-sensitive relief and responses that target women and seek to improve their coping capacity and status in the context of disaster management in Pakistan (NDMA, 2023).

A number of issues arise while practicing inclusive disaster management policies in Pakistan in terms of financial, human resource, technological, social, cultural, educational, and governance perspectives. Some of these challenges include poor funding and resource mobilization, particularly in the rural areas of Punjab and Baluchistan, which hampers infrastructure and human resources for disaster management. The lack of technology and poor infrastructure prevent equal participation and access to services, especially for women. Patriarchal cultural attitudes hinder

women's participation in disaster management and decision-making processes. Lack of education leads to low literacy levels, making women unable to comprehend and participate in disaster risk reduction. Besides, lack of coordinated governance and political will make it difficult to implement gender-sensitive policies even if legislation has been passed, as evidenced in the mitigation and response to past disasters, such as the 2010 floods and the 2013 earthquake. Therefore, it is important to address these challenges to enhance the efficiency and integration of disaster management in Pakistan (Ali & Hameed, 2018).

International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) play a significant role in gender equality and women's participation in disaster management in Pakistan. Some of the organizations that carry out these initiatives include UN Women, Oxfam, Action Aid, and Plan International. Such efforts consist of training on disaster response and management, women's leadership, and gender-sensitive policies. Thus, by challenging societal norms and offering the required skills and resources, INGOs play a significant role in decreasing women's risks and enhancing their ability to prevent and cope with disasters in Pakistan (UN Women, Oxfam, Action Aid, Plan International, 2023). Local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Pakistan are actively involved in the participation of women during disaster response. The NGOs working for women and disasters include SEED, Sungi Development Foundation, Awaaz Foundation, Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Center, and Rural Support Program Network (RSPN). Their initiative includes increasing women's representation in decision-making through the formation of women's committees, provision of gender-sensitive health and sanitary facilities, vocational training, and women empowerment through micro-finance. Thus, these local NGOs can help to identify the needs and threats that women experience in disaster-affected regions and contribute to the development of community capacity and sustainable recovery (Awaaz et Gah, RSPN, 2023).

3. Research Methodology

For the research design in this study, ontology is constructivist, while epistemology is interpretive, which aligns with a qualitative approach to assess women's empowerment in disaster management in Pakistan. Constructivism acknowledges the relativistic features of reality and experience, which are important in understanding how women experience or view empowerment in disasters. Interpretivism looks at the participants' perceptions and emotions, which can be captured well by tools such as focus groups. Such an approach enables the study to incorporate cultural and societal factors that influence women's participation in

disaster response and recovery efforts and to promote the identification of gender-sensitive recommendations that can enhance disaster management practices and legislation in Pakistan (Creswell, 2020; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

This study employs both primary and secondary data collection methods, including focus group discussions and document reviews, to acquire the most relevant data to address the research questions. It is possible to design data collection tools from the research questions during focus group discussions, which is crucial for framing the complex and context-specific nature of women's participation in disaster management in Pakistan. Using purposive sampling, multiple perspectives and experiences will be received that can either reinforce or challenge prior knowledge and practices in disaster management in the given local context (Bryman, 2012).

This study used qualitative research methods that entail focus group discussions (FGDs) and document analysis. FGDs were used to assess the qualitative experience of women's empowerment in relation to disaster management in the context of Pakistan, the participants' roles, and decision-making powers. They provide a platform for analyzing indigenous practices in dealing with disasters and the social perceptions of indigenous practices to enhance gender-sensitive policies. Document review complements FGDs by integrating a review of text documents, such as governmental and NGOs reports, policies, and project documents, by validating and expanding the data obtained from FGD. Altogether, these methods offer a comprehensive strategy for studying women's participation in disasters and can help improve related policies and programmes (Jones & Brown, 2019; Brown & Taylor, 2019).

The participants of this study were community members, activists, NGO workers, and others involved in disaster response and women's rights in Pakistan. The study employed a purposive sampling technique to enroll many respondents from diverse backgrounds. FGDs and document analyses of government policies and NGO reports will provide a clearer picture of gender relations and disaster policies (Smith & Johnson, 2018).

This study focuses on data transcription, initial coding, and theme development using a qualitative research methodology. To ensure that there was no loss of data, all data from focus group discussions and document analyses were transcribed carefully. To achieve the first step of coding, data segments were categorized into meaningful codes to identify themes. Themes will be developed systematically to enhance the interpretation and analysis of qualitative data with reference to women's empowerment in disaster management in Pakistan. Collected data will be handled and processed using NVivo software for

detailed searches and a comprehensible presentation of the research (Creswell, 2022; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The focus group discussion questionnaire for this qualitative study comprised of five sections. It aims to examine the factors that might hinder women from engaging in disaster response and reconstruction processes, culture, and social influence. Specifically, it discusses success stories and lessons learned about women's engagement in disaster response, assesses the advantages of women's involvement in disasters, reviews existing policies, and uses evidence to make recommendations for their participation in disaster response. This approach seeks to gather specific information on how the role of women can be enhanced in disaster risk management, response, and recovery in Pakistan.

There are some limitations to data collection and analysis. The disadvantage of purposive sampling is that if the criteria selected are not well defined and objective, there may be more bias to select only certain kinds of opinions and exclude others. Data collection techniques, such as focus groups, take time and may not capture all the experiences. Analysis techniques, such as thematic analysis, are systematic in nature, but the degree of subjectivity depends on the researcher. Ethical considerations included issues regarding informed consent, participants' identity, power, dynamics, and being truthful during the research processes. These measures are important in enhancing the rights of the participants and the reliability of the generated data in areas sensitive to gender and disasters.

4. Research Findings and Analysis

4.1 Focus Groups

For the collection of qualitative data for the research study on women's empowerment in disaster management in Pakistan, focus group discussions were conducted with four focus groups, each with eight participants. Two groups were represented by NGOs and INGOs that focused on disaster management and women's rights, and were chosen based on the experience of the participants and the scope of their organizations. Two more groups were selected from the disaster-affected areas of Jacobabad and Azad Jammu and Kashmir through a purposive sampling technique to include participants of different socioeconomic statuses and directly involved in disaster management and community welfare. The discussions proved useful in identifying issues and approaches to increasing women's involvement in disaster management in various parts of Pakistan, although some groups were not fully gender-balanced due to cultural factors in the region.

The findings of the four FGDs revealed various

factors that affect women's empowerment in disaster management in Pakistan. Some of the challenges mentioned are the limited roles of women in cultural practices, lack of resources and training, and gender-based violence during disasters. Measures that were considered included women-only training sessions, outreach programs, and lobbying for gender-sensitive policies. Other difficulties, such as lack of voice in decision making and lack of equal access to information and services, were also highlighted. Recommendations were made to increase awareness campaigns, improve educational opportunities, and increase mentorship and leadership training for women in disaster management in various sociocultural settings in Pakistan.

Focus group discussions on women's roles in disaster management in Pakistan were analyzed using NVivo software, which identified the following themes and subthemes.

4.2 Themes and Subthemes from Focus Group Interviews

Theme ONE - Factors Influencing Women's Empowerment

Subtheme 1.1 - Cultural norms and gender roles

Subtheme 1.2 - Access to resources and training

Subtheme 1.3 - Gender-based violence during disasters

Subtheme 1.4 - Socioeconomic status

Subtheme 1.5 - Education and literacy

Theme TWO - Strategies for Enhancing Women's Participation

Subtheme 2.1 - Women-specific training programs

Subtheme 2.2 - Community engagement initiatives

Subtheme 2.3 - Advocacy for gender-inclusive policies

Subtheme 2.4 - Mentorship and leadership development

Theme THREE - Barriers to Women's Participation

Subtheme 3.1 Inadequate representation in decision-making

Subtheme 3.2 - Unequal access to information and services

Subtheme 3.3 - Lack of awareness about women's roles in disaster management

Theme FOUR - Recommendations for Strengthening Women's Role

Subtheme 4.1 - Promote awareness campaigns

Subtheme 4.2 - Enhance educational opportunities

Subtheme 4.3 - Foster mentorship and leadership training

Subtheme 4.4 - Integrate gender perspective in disaster management policies and plans

The research findings are also relevant to Bult's framework of women's empowerment in disaster

management. This study effectively identifies key areas that hinder the advancement of women, including culture, resource constraints, and violence against women. These correspond to the individual, household, and community levels of empowerment, respectively, as described in Bult's framework. In addition, the research correctly points out measures that can be taken to increase women's representation, such as training, community mobilization, and lobbying for gender mainstreaming. These correspond to community and institutional levels of empowerment in Bult's framework. Thus, addressing these levels, this research advances the understanding of the multifaceted factors influencing women's empowerment in disaster management.

This study also provides a direct response to its research objectives. It systematically reviews the determinants of women's empowerment, discusses the opportunities and challenges for their engagement, and offers research-based suggestions to enhance women's empowerment and disaster risk reduction. Some research findings include the contextual nature of women's experiences, the need for multiple-level interventions, power relations, and intersectionality. These findings highlight the importance of context-specific strategies that consider women's cultural, social, and economic realities in various parts of the country.

4.3 Document Analysis

The findings of the study based on the analysis of selected policy documents show that there are considerable efforts and difficulties in integrating gender perspectives into disaster management in Pakistan. The National Disaster Management Act (2010), National Disaster Response Plan (2012), Pakistan National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy (2012), and National Disaster Risk Management Framework (2013) all emphasize gender sensitivity. They understand the unique risks that women face and support their integration in all phases of disaster management. However, implementation gaps still exist, such as insufficient funding for gender-related programs and a top-down approach that may fail to consider local women's leadership and knowledge.

Documents from the non-government sector include the Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction Handbook (2010), Gender Guidelines for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation (2014), and reports from the UN Women and Plan International Pakistan, which focus on the implementation of gender mainstreaming in disaster risk reduction. These documents underscore the importance of culturally sensitive and context-specific strategies, women's education and leadership, and policy changes that would improve women's participation in disaster risk

reduction initiatives.

4.4 Themes and Subthemes from Document Analysis

Theme ONE - Policy Framework and Gender Mainstreaming

Subtheme 1.1 - Recognition of women's vulnerabilities in disaster contexts

Subtheme 1.2 - Inclusion in disaster planning and response frameworks

Subtheme 1.3 - Legal and policy provisions for gender-sensitive disaster management

Theme TWO - Socioeconomic and Cultural Contexts

Subtheme 2.1 - Impact of cultural norms on women's roles in disasters

Subtheme 2.2 - Economic disparities affecting women's resilience

Subtheme 2.3 - Access to education and training opportunities

Theme THREE - Participation and Leadership

Subtheme 3.1 - Barriers to women's participation in decision-making roles

Subtheme 3.2 - Role of women's leadership in community resilience

Subtheme 3.3 - Strategies for enhancing women's involvement in disaster management

Theme FOUR - Capacity Building and Awareness

Subtheme 4.1 - Training initiatives for women in disaster preparedness

Subtheme 4.2 - Awareness campaigns on gender-sensitive disaster approaches

Subtheme 4.3 - Knowledge dissemination and skill development

Theme FIVE - Policy Implementation and Resource Allocation

Subtheme 5.1 - Challenges in implementing gender policies in disaster management

Subtheme 5.2 - Resource allocation for gender-specific disaster initiatives

Subtheme 5.3 - Monitoring and evaluation frameworks

Theme SIX – Community Engagement and Local Knowledge

Subtheme 6.1 - Importance of local women's knowledge in disaster response

Subtheme 6.2 - Community-based approaches to disaster risk reduction

Subtheme 6.3 - Strengthening community resilience through gender-sensitive practices

Bult's framework offers a systematic way of analyzing women's empowerment in disaster management across the individual, household, community, and institutional domains. The research objectives are to identify factors that affect women's empowerment, examine their role in disaster management, and integrate them. The identified themes and subthemes provide concrete research avenues such

as policy, socioeconomic factors, participation, capacity building, and community engagement.

When these elements are aligned, it is possible to understand how the themes are related to various levels of Bult's framework and research objectives. For instance, the policy-related themes (Themes 1 and 5) are most relevant to the institutional level and research objectives a and c, while participation and leadership (Theme 3) are associated with the individual, community, and institutional levels and all the objectives of the study.

To conduct a positive and effective critique, it is essential to consider entangled factors, such as intersectionality, power dynamics, and contemporary contexts affecting women's lives. Furthermore, focusing on recommendations based on evidence will aid in developing a proper methodology for incorporating women's participation in disaster response.

5. Summary and Recommendations

The qualitative analysis of women's empowerment in disaster management in Pakistan involved focus group discussions with NGOs, INGOs, and professionals participating in disaster management processes. The study also provided a snapshot of several aspects that influence women's advancement in this respect, such as cultural barriers that confine women to their homes, restricted use of resources and training, and an elevated risk of violence during calamities. Intervention strategies to enhance women's participation include training and capacity building, community mobilization, advocacy, and leadership. Nevertheless, problems such as decision-making power and lack of information control still exist; therefore, more precise solutions are required.

The policy review indicated that Pakistan has significantly advanced in the mainstreaming gender dimension in disaster risk management policies, as represented by the National Disaster Management Act and gender-related policies. These policies recognize women's vulnerability and their engagement in all phases of disaster response, but there are implementation gaps. Difficulties include insufficient funding for gender-related projects and a centralized approach that can overshadow women's leadership and locally situated knowledge.

In summary, this study provides a detailed analysis of the factors that influence women's engagement in disaster management in Pakistan. This highlights the need to consider cultural, socioeconomic, and policy factors to ensure that women are empowered. Through the promotion of gender-sensitive policies, improvement of education, and encouragement of inclusive practices, stakeholders can support women's leadership in disaster resilience,

thus creating more equal and resilient societies. Continued attempts to promote mainstream gender at the policy and community levels are essential for the promotion of women's rights in disasters across the country.

The following recommendations have been suggested on the basis of the findings.

- Design and conduct targeted capacity-building interventions for women in disaster-affected regions. Therefore, these programmes should aim to develop competencies in disaster preparedness, response, and leadership. Integrate sections that focus on gender-related risks and engage females in community resilience initiatives.

- Strengthen community-based strategies that ensure women's participation in disaster risk reduction planning and decision-making. Promote platforms where women can bring out their local knowledge and concerns in disaster risk reduction processes. The involvement of NGOs, local communities, and governmental organizations should be promoted to ensure that everyone is involved.

- Promote mainstreaming of gender considerations into national and local disaster risk management strategies and plans. Ensure that the policies under consideration are accompanied by clear links to women's needs, risks in emergencies, and their right to make decisions.

- Create fellowship programs that connect female disaster management professionals with young talent and other community members. Provide management courses that allow females to act as advocates for the communities' needs and concerns during the mitigation, response, and recovery phases of the disaster.

- Organize public awareness campaigns that would seek to change the culture and perception of women as incapable of handling disaster response and management responsibilities. Sensitize communities regarding the role of gender in increasing resilience and encouraging young women to undertake courses in disaster risk reduction and management.

- Promote gender-responsive disaster risk management interventions by allocating sufficient funds and resources for exclusive gender-focused initiatives. Focus on education, training, technology, and leadership development for women to counter existing deficiencies in funding and program implementation.

- Construct indicators to assess the level of compliance with gender mainstreaming in disaster management. Engage in regular evaluations of policies and programs for efficiency and adherence to gender-responsive policies throughout disaster management processes.

Through the adoption of these recommendations, stakeholders will be able to enhance the disaster

management process in Pakistan. In addition to increasing the ability of communities to cope with future disasters, women's participation promotes fair and sustainable development.

6. Conclusion

In this study, the level of women's engagement in disaster management in Pakistan was analyzed, and many challenges, including gender roles and stereotypes, limited access to resources, and gendered violence in emergencies, were identified. The study also considered ways in which women's involvement could be improved through targeted training, community mobilization, and lobbying for gender-sensitive policies. Furthermore, the study revealed the need for education, mentoring, and gender-sensitive policies to counter these barriers. This study is consistent with prior studies that have highlighted the struggles that women encounter in disaster management, especially in conservative cultures. In a way that is consistent with previous research undertaken in other South Asian environments, this research also suggests that social/cultural barriers limit women's disaster risk management as noted by Enarson (2012) and Alam & Rahman (2014). However, this study goes further by offering insights into Pakistan's contextual factors, which have not been fully documented in the existing literature. These findings have critical implications for policymakers, practitioners, and NGOs dealing with disaster management in Pakistan. This underscores the critical importance of integrating women in disaster risk management. By identifying the existing gaps in policy and practice, this study calls for more sensitive and effective approaches towards disaster risk management for women. The work also points to future intervention strategies, including capacity-building programs and policy transformations for the promotion of women in an improved disaster management system. A major advantage of this study is the use of a qualitative research method that enables an understanding of women's experiences in disaster management in Pakistan. Focus group discussions and document analysis provided rich data that helped develop a clear understanding of the problem. However, it has limitations, such as purposive sampling, which may lead to bias, and qualitative analysis is subjective in nature. Focusing on certain areas within Pakistan can also be a drawback, because the findings may not be applicable to other environments. Guided by this research, this paper recommends that disaster management policies focused on Pakistan should consider adopting gender-sensitive measures with consideration to the cultural and socio-economic realities on the ground. Continuous campaigning is required to change the culture that hinders women from

participating in disaster response efforts. Future research on this topic should continue to focus on the effectiveness of such interventions in the long run and enlarge the sample to cover various geographical areas of the country and a variety of age groups. Moreover, compared with other countries in the region, this research could identify proper strategies for women's involvement in disaster management.

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Authors' Contributions

This research study is part of the first author's PhD thesis, and all the work was done by the first author under the supervision of the co-author.

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