

**ASSESSING THE ROLE OF WOMEN  
EMPOWERMENT IN DISASTER  
MANAGEMENT IN PAKISTAN**

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ASSESSING THE ROLE OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN DISASTER  
MANAGEMENT IN PAKISTAN

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## ABSTRACT

This research examines the relationship between women empowerment and disaster management in the context of Pakistan, focusing on the research questions related to the limited involvement of women in disaster response initiatives because of social, educational, and economic constraints in the country. The study seeks to identify how these barriers affect the contributions of women in disaster risk reduction, response and recovery. The research embraces a qualitative research design, and the main data collection techniques include focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and policy documents review. This paper uses Bult's conceptual model to analyse the processes, dimensions, and interventions that are required to achieve women's empowerment at the individual, community and institutional levels. The relevance of the model is that it offers a multiple perspective approach for incorporating gender related approaches onto disaster management policies. Thus, the study reveals that the major barriers, including limited mobility, gender stereotype, lack of education and training, and limited access to financial resources, limit women's participation in disaster management. It is important to note that these findings are similar and replicated in all the data sources used, meaning that these barriers are persistent. A major strength of the study is that the findings provide practical implementation strategies for enhancing the involvement of women in disaster management. It highlights capacity development, raising community awareness, and the integration of gender-responsive strategies in disaster response plans as critical measures for addressing disaster risks. The study also aims at highlighting the positive effects associated with women empowerment including better early warning mechanisms, efficient relief operations, and harmonious social relations. Pursuant to the limitations, the study concentrated on specific areas and excluded quantitative information which could have been useful. Further research should focus on whether such policies remain sustainable and feasible in the long run and on how the applicability of the suggested measures depends on cultural and geographical differences.

**Keywords:** Women empowerment, disaster management, capacity building, gender-sensitive risk assessments, reconstruction and recovery plans

## **APPROVAL**

This is to certify that this thesis conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The student has been supervised by: **Associate Professor Dr Oo Yu Hock**

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(11 September 2024)

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted in fulfilment of the PhD degree is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the program and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

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**Signature of Candidate:**

**Date:** 11 September 2024



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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATION**

AKDN	Aga Khan Development Network
CBDRR	Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction
CBO	Community-based Organization
DDMA	District Disaster Management Authority
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EWS	Early Warning Systems
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FGD	Focus Group
GBV	Gender Based Violence
ICS	Incident Command System
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
ILO	International Labor Organization
INSARAG	International Search and Rescue Advisory Group
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MOCC	Ministry of Climate Change
NCSW	National Commission on the Status of Women
NDMA	National Disaster Management Authority

NDMP	National Disaster Management Plan
NDRMF	National Disaster Risk Management Framework
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PDMA	Provincial Disaster Management Authority
SAR	Search and Rescue Operations
STDs	Sexually transmitted diseases
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organization
WOND	Women's Organization for Nation Development

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Overview

Disaster management is the systematic planning, synchronization, and implementation of activities premeditated to decrease the effect of natural and man-made calamities on people and nations. It deliberates methods for preparedness, reaction, recovery, and mitigation. Successful disaster management is important for protecting lives, curtailing infrastructure and property damage, and quickening disaster recovery (Khan et al., 2022). Pre-disaster planning and training are significant for ensuring that societies are prepared to respond when catastrophe hits. This stage involves establishing early warning systems, organizing evacuations, and collecting supplies (UNDRR, 2024). According to IFRC (2024), the main emphasis of the response stage is on the initial actions taken during and after a disaster to preserve lives and deliver relief to the impacted individuals. The emergency response squads, delivery of aid, and dispersal of resources such as shelter, water and food are all its part. Recovery processes after a disaster have aim of reconstructing the affected people and return things to normal. This stage comprises of dealing with the social and economic consequences of disasters in the long-run, reconstructing infrastructure, and rebuilding livelihoods (UNDP, 2024). The Mitigation phase of disaster management attempts to manage the key reasons of disasters in order to decline the possible impacts on environment, property and people. A few instances of mitigation approaches consist of improvements in infrastructure, awareness campaigns, construction guidelines, land-use plannings and hazard mapping to improve resilience (FEMA, 2024).



In Pakistan, numerous natural and man-made devastations such as landslides, floods and earthquakes regularly happen. Governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as international partners all share the purpose of refining disaster preparedness, response systems, and recovery activities. Initiatives for risk reduction and community involvement are included in Pakistan's disaster management plan (Rana et al., 2021). The notion of women empowerment is described by using concepts from psychology, politics, culture and economy. It is significant to authorize women in decision-making and management of resources. Women's independence is vital for disaster management. Hemachandra et al. (2020) found that women who are empowered are more able to contribute to disaster risk reduction, response, and recovery activities. Women in Pakistan still face a variety of challenges before they can fully take part in disaster management processes, despite the potential benefits. The first climate change policy in the country was formulated during the year of 2012 and the National Ministry of Climate Change was established during the same year (MOCC, 2023). Despite the efforts made in the context of environmental protection, the progress is not up to the mark and implementation process is facing problems because of institutional weaknesses. The women in Pakistan have lower socio-economic status and women and girls are overlooked in disasters despite of establishment of "gender and child cell" within national disaster management authority (NDMA, 2024). The cell develops national policy plans on vulnerable groups in disasters but these plans had not yet been implemented in a true sense. There is certainly a gap between policies being put in practice on the ground. There are several impressive execution examples of policies, but the truth is that those policies aren't creating better results, so a lot of work has to be done to translate the national policies to the local level (Yu et al., 2018).

## **1.1 Background of the Study**

The foundation of the idea of empowerment can be taken from the works of Paulo Freire (1974) who was a Brazilian researcher. The acknowledgement of the presence of two essential forces; the oppressors and the oppressed, within any society is the central assumption of Freire's perspective. These forces serve as indicators of the uneven power dynamics that permeate social interactions and systems. The oppressed are individuals who endure marginalization, and discrimination, within society, whereas the oppressors are those who have positions of power, privilege, and control. Freire was the first to adopt the term "conscientization," which describes the process of developing critical consciousness. Critical consciousness is the ability to assess, probe, and examine the present social order. It demands knowledge of one's part in sustaining or eliminating the underlying injustices and inequalities in society. People may become active change agents instead of being passive targets of oppression. Making students into "subjects" rather than "objects" of history is the ultimate objective of Freire's educational paradigm. Subjects are those who actively advance society and make decisions that affect their own life. Because they are aware of their impact, they strive to build a society that is more just and equitable (Veugelers, 2017).

The idea of "empowerment" has its roots in other concepts such as theology, Freudian psychology, Gandhism and the Black Power empowerment (Nagel, 2020). The terms empowerment and liberation theology are occasionally used synonymously in theology. In the 1960s, Latin America saw the emergence of the liberation theology movement. Liberation theologians contend that the church should place a high priority on freeing the oppressed from suffering and injustice. They believed that the church needed to get involved in social and political transformation. The empowerment concept has also been established, and it is consistent with Freudian psychology. Freud

said that people are driven by a desire for power. He asserted that people always want to exert control over both their environment and their own lives. Freud thought that empowerment was necessary for maintaining psychological health. Another movement that influenced the evolution of the perspective of empowerment was Gandhism. Gandhi had a significant role in advancing Indian independence. He believed that peaceful protest may lead to greater freedom for individuals. Gandhi believed that everyone has the potential to become strong, regardless of social status or place of birth. The Black Power movement had an impact on how the concept of empowerment emerged. In the US, "Black Power" emerged as a social and political movement in the 1960s. Black Power activists believe that African Americans should be in charge of their own future. According to them, black people are needed to establish their own institutions, groups, and cultures. Nagel (2020) defined empowerment as a collaborative development with the help of which society experiences the personal as well as social transformation. This transformation enables the people to attain control on the institutions and organizations that have impact on their lives and the communities where they reside.

Women's freedom to live their own lives and actively engage in all aspects of society is one of the most significant elements in the empowering process. The objective is to establish a welcoming environment where women may reach their potential and benefit society. Women may be empowered by encouraging an environment that allows for full involvement in all facets of life. A component of this is ensuring that women have access to needs like healthcare, employment, and education. Women need to be able to make decisions in addition to having their rights maintained. The empowerment of women is significantly influenced by governments and organizations. The goal of women empowerment is to eliminate gender disparity

and achieve gender equality in all aspects of life. The root causes of gender inequality, such as discrimination, patriarchal norms and attitudes, and violence against women, must be addressed in order to bring about this transformation (Cornwall, 2016). The thought of empowerment can be understood in a better way when it is contextualized to the social, educational, economic and political empowerment of women. The social empowerment deals with gender discriminations that occur between men and women segments of society. Educational empowerment basically indicates increase in educational opportunities of women so that they become capable of taking meaningful choices about themselves and their families. The economic empowerment signifies the role of women as “bread winners” and self-reliant to create means for revenue generation from different economic schemes and face the challenges associated with poverty. The political empowerment is the process of advancing women political interests. The psychological empowerment indicates the progression in enhancing the motivation of women to become more participative in national programs, such as politics, health, education and agriculture (Sharaunga et al., 2018).

Islamic feminism is demarcated by Islamic intellectuals as being more thorough than secular feminism and as being attached with the sermon of Islam and Quran-e-Pak as its essential transcript. Islam liberated women in all domains by empowering them financially and socially and they can take decisions related to their own lives, become aware of their capabilities and able to achieve their biggest dreams. Hazrat Khadija (RA) is the most prominent example as a Muslim empowered woman (Mir-Hosseini, 2019). According to Islamic feminists, within the bounds of Islamic principles and teachings, Islam already provides a framework for women empowerment and equality; all they are doing is reclaiming and reinterpreting Islamic teachings to challenge patriarchal interpretations of Islam (Sirri, 2021). Muslims who

support gender equality assert that the Quran, the foundational text of their religion, promotes the inherent equality of all people. They cite Qur'anic texts that, according to them, have been misinterpreted by patriarchal explanations because they uphold the equality of men and women on the spiritual level (Bakhshizadeh, 2023). Islamic feminism has had a profound influence on Muslim civilizations worldwide. Within Islamic communities, it has sparked conversations about social justice, women's rights, and gender equality. Islamic feminists are still fighting for a more inclusive and fairer Islam that respects women's autonomy and rights (Esra Mirze Santesso & Mcclung, 2017).

Before creation of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, founder of country mentioned in one his addresses (1944) that no nation can progress without having its women side by side. He was of the view that Pakistani nation should come out of evil customs that keep a woman within the four walls of house as prisoner (Saba & Bari, 2020). The Ministry of Women Development, Social Welfare and Special Education presented the national guidelines regarding women empowerment within the framework provided by International Labor Organization (2018). The focus of these guidelines is to realize the full potential of Pakistani women in all fields of life without having any discrimination related to their religion, caste, creed and any other such consideration. The National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women was considered a working document by the President of Pakistan in August 1998 under the Beijing Platform. In order to promote gender equality and women's advancement, the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) was founded in July 2000, with particular objectives and these objectives are:

- i. Analyzing government programs, policies, and other activities.
- ii. Reviewing the laws, policies, and norms that affect how women are treated.

- iii. Paying attention to the institutional and judicial processes to address violations of individual and women's rights.
- iv. Promoting analysis and research that provide solutions to gender and women's concerns.
- v. Connecting NGOs, professionals, and individuals from all walks of life on a national, international, and regional level (Javaria Mona Khalid et al., 2023).

Since its formation, the NCSW has achieved a lot of progress in some important fields. It has provided support in the process of scrutinizing and lobbying for legal changes, for instance changes to the Hudood Ordinances, the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010), and the Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act (2011). The above legislations show how NCSW has been effective in the removal of legal hurdles to the rights of women. Further, it has also participated in the monitoring and assessing of government policies, and the integration of gender consideration in the implementation of national plans. Still, there are issues that have not yet been solved at present. Most of the structural factors and social norms that contribute to gender discrimination have also remained hard to change. The NCSW still experiences challenges of translating its policy recommendations and impacting organizational practices systematically, especially in the rural areas. Additionally, there had been insufficient funding and political support to enforce the laws and protect women's rights as well as affect radical change. Therefore, despite significant achievements made in promoting gender equality in the past two decades through the implementation of the NCSW, the goals of the NCSW are yet to be fully realized. Sustained initiatives are required since legal, cultural, and institutional prejudices continue to confine women's advancement in Pakistan (Khan et al., 2022).

Feudalism has existed in Pakistan since the Mughal Empire and despite the nation's independence in 1947, feudal lords retained a considerable influence. There are several detrimental effects of Pakistan's feudal system on women. Women have been marginalized, for instance, as a result of their absence from positions of power and maltreatment that includes forced labor and other types of abuse. A kind of social stratification known as the caste system divides people into groups based on where they were born or what they do for a profession. The cast or class system that can be still observed in different areas of Pakistan has a noteworthy undesirable effect on women. For instance, women from lower statuses have no opportunities for their education and careers. There is no access of women from lower classes to social services such as justice. Numerous issues that Pakistani women face is an outcome of the marginalization of specific ethnicities. Women residing in rural areas or belonging to religious minorities encounter challenges in accessing education and work. The freedom of women was destructively hampered by each of these reasons. Women in Pakistan face many problems like no career prospects, child marriages and violence. It has been more tough for women to remove these hurdles and use their competencies due to marginalization of particular demographic communities, the caste and feudal system (Bushra & Wajiha, 2015).

Women are generally excessively affected by calamities because of various reasons comprising of gender roles, socio economic elements, cultural norms, discriminatory power traits, lack of access to information and resources and economic inequality. An amalgamation of these aspects creates more difficulties for women during disaster relief operations (Trentin et al., 2023). A study by Lipinski et al. (2016) found that after the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, women died at a rate that was 14 times greater than men's. The United Nations have included gender equality and

women empowerment as its 17th sustainable development goal in 2015. The economic empowerment of women is emphasized in Gender Action Plan as the main focus of attention in all initiatives for climate policy and action. According to UNFCCC (2022), the equal and meaningful women's leadership and participation is necessary in reaching climate goal. The Earth Day organization (2020) presented a list of 76 solutions to deal with the challenges related to disasters and "women empowerment" in developing countries of the world has been considered as the second-best solution in this list (Breland, 2020).

In Pakistan, women are marginalized in various areas and communities because of many religious, social and cultural constraints whereas their essential roles in all economic sectors cannot be ignored during the process of dealing with development objectives. The disasters are increasing financial problems for many families and these challenges are leading to abjuration of women's fundamental rights such as access to clean water, food, education and health facilities. The women have to cover a great distance to bring clean water for their families in the drought-affected areas (Sara Rizvi Jafree, 2023). According to Sadia et al., (2016) female employment opportunities are limited and women are not able to participate in tackling the financial burden of their households, especially when it is required during disasters. Pakistan is among the countries that are signatories of many international treaties for protection of women's rights but the gaps in policy formulation and policy implementation are observed commonly.

## **1.2 Motivation of the Study**

The rationale for this study derives from the researcher background and knowledge as well as the current research in gender, disaster management, and empowerment. Being one of the countries that are frequently hit by natural disasters, Pakistan still faces