

Climate change and violence against women: Examining the linkages

Dr. Savita Tomar*

Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Sanjay Gandhi (P.G.) College, Sarurpur Khurd, Meerut

Abstract - Climate change affects all sections of the population, but women, especially in developing countries, have to bear the major brunt of its negative impacts. This is because of their gender-based roles and socio-economic-cultural factors, which restrict their mobility, level of education and skill development. This gives them a secondary status, thus exacerbating gender-based inequalities. Global estimates by WHO indicate that about one in three women worldwide experience some form of violence in their lifetime. In the wake of climatic stresses and extremes, women may face increased violence, be it physical, psychological, sexual, verbal or economic.

The paper has shown evidence that women face increased violence during and after climatic stresses. The most prominent form of violence experienced included domestic violence, verbal abuse and sexual harassment in shelter homes or during the collection of resources for the household. Since climatic changes and extremes are likely to increase in future, it is important to incorporate the linkage between climate change and violence against women to design suitable adaptation frameworks and policies. This will help in achieving various national and international sustainable development goals of gender equality.

Keywords - Climate change, violence against women, sustainable development goals

-----X-----

INTRODUCTION

According to United Nations (1994), Violence Against Women (VAW) is defined as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, sexual or mental harm or suffering of women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private. Violence Against Women (VAW) manifests itself as physical, sexual, emotional and economic forms. Universally, the most common forms of violence against women include domestic and intimate partner violence, sexual violence (including rape), sexual harassment, and emotional or psychological violence (UNWOMEN, 2013). Global estimates by WHO indicate that about 1 in 3 (35%) of women worldwide experience either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.

Climate change has been an important issue which will be accompanied by increasing mean temperatures resulting in melting of glaciers, sea level rise and frequent occurrence of floods, droughts, cyclones, hurricanes, bushfires as well as conflicts over natural resources. There are evidences that climatic stress has enhanced the burden of women in terms of facing

difficulties related to health, income, education, hygiene, decision-making and also violence against women. There are only a few studies conducted on change in the level of violence faced by women in the event of climatic stresses or extremes. The studies are also sporadic and scattered, done with very diverse methodologies and sample sizes. There is a need to build them into a body of evidence to examine the inter-relationship between climate change and violence against women.

Instances that women face violence as a result of climatic stresses includes domestic violence and beaten up husband and male relatives due to the wake of stress and loss of employment opportunities, sexual harassment in shelter homes or work sites, rapes, honor killing, witch killings, forced or early marriages and many more will be discussed in the paper. The present paper aims to put together the studies conducted in different parts of the world that focuses on the relationship between climatic disaster and violence against women and if climate change and climatic disasters enhance the incidents of violence against women.

METHODOLOGY

The present paper is based on review of secondary data on climatically stressed situations and occurrence of various types of violence against women in different parts of the world. Global studies published in research papers and reports have been reviewed extensively to search for evidence for any change in the kind and frequency of violence against women during and after climatic disasters and extremes. It is important to mention that all the studies have been conducted with varying sample sizes, methodologies and have very different outputs and therefore are not directly comparable to each other. Some of the studies are anecdotal as they are based on case studies of individuals since collecting data on domestic violence is a very difficult and challenging task considering the issue's sensitivity.

According to U.N. Women, violence against women manifests itself in physical, sexual, emotional and economic forms. Therefore, the studies have been collated and categorized in terms of these four types of violence that may have occurred during and post disaster due to climate change and extremes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Physical violence

According to working definitions of forms of exposure to violence by WHO; physical violence is defined as: 'being slapped or having something thrown at you that could hurt you, being pushed or shoved, being hit with a fist or something else that could hurt, being kicked, dragged or beaten up, being choked or burnt on purpose, and/or being threatened with, or actually, having a gun, knife or other weapon used on you'.

Physical violence is the most common and observable kind of violence. It was seen in most of the situations during and post climatic stress such as floods, cyclones, droughts, hurricanes and bushfires. In a majority of cases, the increased stress caused by the loss of employment opportunities of the male members of the family and increased consumption of alcohol and cannabis led to increased incidences of violence against women. In a study conducted in Bangladesh, after occurrence of floods, it was found that physical abuse was encountered by more than 34 percent of the women and 39 percent women reported being beaten by their husband (Azad et al, 2013). Similarly in Tanzania (East Africa); it was found that 23 percent of women in the sample report had experienced at least one form of physical violence (beating, hitting, slapping and pushing) or sexual violence over their lifetime. But, within the twelve months period after droughts (2008-09), roughly 10 percent reported some form of physical violence, one percent reported of severe-physical violence (such as choking or use of weaponry), and five percent sexual violence (Abiona and Koppensteiner, 2016). Other qualitative and quantitative findings in Bangladesh between 2010 & 2011 indicated that women from extremely poor

households faced 10 percent increased levels of external physical violence in both rural and urban areas during and after hazards (Ahmed, 2012).

In Bihar (India) and Bangladesh, it was found that after floods, the role of women as caregivers was not fulfilled, due to which they became the victims of stress and trauma not only outside but also within the family. The frustrated husbands resulted in beating their wives. Male relatives used abusive language or exerted physical force either because they felt stressed at being incapable of providing for their families or because they habitually used alcohol or ganja (cannabis). The reasons given for the physical as well as verbal abuse was that the women were not able to manage resources properly, were not serving food in time, and not being able to procure relief materials (Madhuri, 2016; WEDO, 2008). Similarly in Bangladesh, Gujarat (India), Nepal and other saline- and drought-prone regions, increased cases of physical assault of the wives had been noticed because women had to travel long distances to get potable water and fuel wood for the family, due to which there was delays in serving food to the husband and family (Sugden et al., 2014).

The most recognized form of domestic violence is physical violence. In a qualitative study done in Australia after Black Saturday Bushfires in 2009 showed that all the women interviewed had spoken about increased community or domestic violence. Some of these relationships experienced no violence before the fires and they discussed about happy and settled relationships prior to Bushfires (Parkinson and Zara, 2013).

According to the research done in 583 districts of India, the impact of reduced rainfall and its effect on violence against women, it was found that reduced rainfall led to 4.4 percent increased cases of domestic violence (Sekhari and Storeygard, 2014). Similarly in Tanzania, it was examined that reduced rainfall pattern had increased the cases of domestic violence by 18.8 percent (Abiona and Koppensteiner, 2016).

The most extreme forms of physical violence are murder and honor killing. Cases of these had been studied with respect to climate change in Pakistan and Tanzania. In Pakistan, it was observed that immediately after flood season in August 2010, the cases of honor killing reported were 75(during floods) against 24 (post floods) (Bukhari and Rizvi, 2015). In Tanzania, it was found that extreme rainfall led to large income drops and a doubling of murders of elderly women in the name of "witch killings". Witch murders are concentrated in the six months of the "hungry season" from February to July during the pre-harvest/harvest period, when the rainfall shock for the next harvest has been realized and most food stocks from the previous harvest are already exhausted (Miguel, 2005).

Sexual violence

According to world report on violence and health, sexual violence is defined as: 'any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work'. Studies from developed and developing countries have revealed the increased cases of sexual violence during and after climatic extremes and stresses.

In a study of Mozambique, the median age for first sexual intercourse for girls was 16 in 2003; but after the droughts in 2016, significant anecdotal evidence suggested that the age of sexual debut has lowered to 11 or 12 years in 2016. The reason behind this downturn was girls aged 11 to 13 were befriending older men as they went out for water collection. After several weeks of proximity, the men were luring the young girls away for a few days of unprotected sex. The girls were then rewarded money or food stocks (CARE, 2016).

A research study post Hurricane Katrina conducted in New Orleans, USA depicted enhanced cases of rapes and sexual assault against women. The study highlighted the results of the internet survey that had been conducted by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center in the first six months post Hurricane Katrina and Rita. It indicated that only sixty percent of the sexual assaults were reported to law enforcement agencies. Ninety-five percent of the victims were "disaster victims". Forty three percent of the perpetrators were acquaintances and current or former intimate partner and forty percent were strangers. Sixty six percent victims were of the age between 15 to 44. The location of the assault was mainly shelter homes or other places such as hotels, perpetrators' homes, or cars. (Thornton and Voigt, 2007).

Forced or early marriages were also increased tremendously during and post disasters because of insecurities such as reducing household burden, reduction of dowry, crime against adolescent girls such as rapes or sexual assault. In Mozambique, it was noticed that during droughts, many families have used child marriage as a coping mechanism to raise income (through payment of a bride price) or to reduce the number of dependents per household. Also, in Bangladesh after Cyclone Sidr (2007); this was observed that about half of the girls enrolled in school, left school as they were married off (Sugden et al., 2014). Similarly, in Pakistan it was found that there was increase in early marriages from 10.7% before floods to 16% after floods (Bukhari and Rizvi, 2015). Uganda's NAPA described this as "famine marriages" which occur in times of drought when families marry off young daughters. This led to increase in the spread

of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) via older husbands who tend to have many sexual partners (WEDO, 2008). Similarly in Malawi and Kenya, increased cases of STDs had been observed after climatic extremes as men migrated away from the native place in search of employment. Women participated in petty trade as well as prostitution to cope up with her difficult periods which also increased their risk of contracting HIV/AIDS (Alam et al., 2015; WEDO, 2008).

Women were more susceptible to other types of sexual violence during and post climatic extremes such as kidnapping, sexual abuse, trafficking, forced prostitution, petty trade and sexual favors in return for rescue or relief material, food or money. Some of these cases occur in shelter homes/relief camps due to lack of privacy around sleep, washing and dressing or while travelling long distances to fetch water for the family (Hussain, 2017; Alam et al., 2015; WEDO, 2008; Brody et al, 2008; CARE, 2016, UNWOMEN, 2015).

Psychological violence

It includes a range of behaviors that encompass acts of emotional abuse and controlling behavior. According to U.N. 2013, this can be categorized into emotional abuse and controlling behavior. Emotional abuse is defined as insulting or making a woman feel bad about herself, belittling or humiliating her in front of others, deliberately scaring or intimidating her, threatening to hurt her or others she cares about. Controlling behavior is defined as isolating a woman by preventing her from seeing family or friends, monitoring her whereabouts and social interactions, ignoring her or treating her indifferently, getting angry if she speaks with other men, making unwarranted accusations of infidelity, controlling her access to health care, education or the labor market.

During and post climatic disaster, women faced emotional or psychological stress that remained mostly unreported. In Bangladesh during 2010-11, it was found that post climatic disasters women from middle-income groups in both urban and rural areas faced thirty percent increase in verbal abuse at home (Ahmed, 2012). Another study from the same place during and post floods 2011, found that around 33 percent of women encountered mental torture and more than 59 percent suffered verbal abuse (Azad et al, 2013). In Pakistan during and post floods 2010, it was found that only 10 percent women can go to the hospitals in case of emergency without taking permission. Others had to take permission from husbands, mother-in-laws or other family members (Bukhari and Rizvi, 2015).

It was seen that psychological violence against women had increased enormously during and post climatic extremes mostly in the form of verbal abuse in Bangladesh, India (Bihar, Assam), Nepal, Pakistan, Australia, USA, Ghana and Senegal. The

reasons noticed behind this emerging psychological abuse was loss of employment and livelihood opportunities of men, unable to provide safety to their family, dislocation from their native place and increased consumption of alcohol (Hussain, 2017; WEDO, 2008; UNWOMEN, 2015, Madhuri, 2016; Thornton and Voigt, 2007).

Economic violence

According to U.N. 2013, Economic violence is difficult to define and can vary significantly according to the cultural context and country circumstances. In general terms, economic violence can involve denying access to property, durable goods or the labor market; deliberately not complying with economic responsibilities, thereby exposing a woman to poverty and hardship; or denying participation in economic decision-making.

During and post climatic disasters when there was loss of livelihood and living locale, women had to face difficulties in collecting resources for their family due to which they faced economic violence. Due to floods, high unemployment rate was found, especially for women. Women had to compromise on their security to find employment and received lower wages than men along with overloaded work. In Bangladesh, it was reported that coworkers physically tortured 23 percent women and mostly by employers (Azad et al, 2013). Another study conducted in Bangladesh, Nepal and India found that after climatic disasters women were promised employment in big cities after but ended up with little choice and had to compromise with their dignity by begging and sometimes, being sold and forced prostitution by professional gangs. The same study found that following Cyclone Sidr in Bangladesh (2007), a significant proportion of girls of schooling age were migrated to the towns to work as domestic workers and in the garment industry. Most of them never returned to school. Some were forced into prostitution, particularly those from the poorest families (Sugden et al., 2014).

Similarly, other qualitative and quantitative findings from Bangladesh revealed that women from middle-income groups usually had to abide by the social norms and family honor, and had limited economic options because they are not allowed to take inappropriate jobs by their families, and be self-reliant. The most prevalent form of abuse in urban areas, external verbal abuse was found to be 30 percent, and directed towards women in the poorest income group, pointing out to the violence that women faced when working outside the home (Ahmed, 2012). In Bihar and Assam (India) post floods, it was found that men used to spend the relief fund on alcohol and cannabis (ganja) and when asked for the money by female members, they beat her hard and the female members had to arrange economic sources for the family (Madhuri, 2016; Hussain, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Studies from different parts of the world had shown that violence against women had increased during and post climatic extremes and climatic disasters. It can be in the form of physical, sexual, psychological or economic. The studies reviewed for the present paper have shown some common causes that are responsible for such instances and show that there are linkages between violence against women and climate change. Due to male dominance in the family, this leads to lack of decision-making by women and makes them more disempowered. Also, in the wake of climatic stresses, the incidences of violence against women have emerged due to increased stress in the family and loss of livelihood. It has been seen that women are living at risk of assault and abuse after such disasters. There is a need to examine such linkages and should be highlighted and communicated for better Gender sensitization of policy makers so that women can lead climate resilient lives.

REFERENCES

1. Abiona, O. & Koppensteiner, M. (2016). *The Impact of Household Shocks on Domestic Violence: Evidence from Tanzania* Working Paper No. 16/14. University of Leicester.
2. Ahmad Bukhari, S., & Hassan Rizvi, S. (2015). Impact of Floods on Women: With Special Reference to Flooding Experience of 2010 Flood in Pakistan. *Journal Of Geography & Natural Disasters*, 05(02). doi: 10.4172/2167-0587.1000140
3. Ahmed, N. (2012). *Gender and Climate Change in Bangladesh* (A summary of ESW report no. P125705). Washington, DC
4. Alam, M. & Bhatia, R. & Mawby, B. (2015). *Women and Climate Change*. Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security
5. Azad, Hossain, and Nasreen, "Flood-Induced Vulnerabilities and Problems Encountered by Women in Northern Bangladesh", *Int. J. Disaster Risk Sci.* 2013, 4 (4): 190–199
6. Brody, A. et al., (2008). *Gender and climate change: mapping the linkages*. Institute of Development Studies (IDS), UK
7. Dankelman, I. et al. *Gender, climate change and human security: Lessons from Bangladesh, Ghana and Senegal*. WEDO/ABANTU/ENDA. (2008).
8. Hussain, M.M. (2017). Assam Drowns Every Year: Challenges of Women during Floods and Building Adaptive Capacity. *International Journal of Research in Economics and Social Sciences (IJRESS)*, Volume 7 (Issue 1), pp. 99-106
9. Madhuri, The Impact of Flooding in Bihar, India on Women. *Asian Women*, 32(1), (2016) pp- 31-52.
10. Miguel, E. (2005). Poverty and Witch Killing. *Review of Economic Studies*, pp. 1153-1172
11. Sekhari and storeygard, "Dowry Deaths: Response to Weather Variability in India",

Journal of Development Economics Volume
111, November 2014, Pages 212-223

12. Sugden, F., Silva, S., Clement, F., Amatya, N., Ramesh, V., Philip, A., & Bharti, L. (2014). *A Framework to Understand Gender and Structural Vulnerability to Climate Change in the Ganges River Basin: Lessons from Bangladesh, India and Nepal*. Colombo: IWMI Working Paper 159. Retrieved from http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/Publications/Working_Papers/working/wor159.pdf
13. Thornton, W. E. & Voigt L. (2007). Disaster Rape: Vulnerability of Women to Sexual Assaults during Hurricane Katrina, *Journal of Public Management & Social Policy*, pp. 23-49
14. UNICEF. *When Coping Crumbles*. New Delhi: UNICEF India. (2016).

Corresponding Author

Dr. Savita Tomar*

Associate Professor, Department of Economics,
Sanjay Gandhi (P.G.) College, Sarurpur Khurd, Meerut