



# Impacts of Climate Change on Gender-based Violence

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**Abstract:** Climate change is a global emerging problem that significantly impacts human beings. The world is trying to save climate change, and behind it, women face gender-based violence due to natural calamities. This study focuses on two objectives: i) to study the effects of climate change and ii) to identify the vulnerable group of gender-based violence. This study further found some effects of climate change on gender-based violence: a scarcity of food and water, the traditional role of society, forced child marriage, and displacement, highlighting that women and girls are vulnerable groups.

**KEYWORDS:** Climate change, Gender-based violence, women, effects, vulnerable

## INTRODUCTION

Around the globe, climate change has become one of the surging problems that affect living beings. It is a long-term process of shifting temperature and weather patterns. Some factors that cause climate change are cutting down trees, burning fossil fuels that emit greenhouse gases, constructing large industries that produce emissions, developing transportation, etc. The effect results in rising temperatures, rising sea water levels, severe storms, drought, floods, spreading diseases, and other natural calamities (UN, Climate Action). These climate change impacts can threaten human health, lives, and security (UNEP). The occurrence of natural disasters differs according to the different regions. However, the causes and consequences of natural disasters can depict death, loss of communities, and destruction of schools, homes, and other infrastructures (UN, Climate Action). Even though the world is fighting for a solution to climate change in general, for women, it can aggravate gender-based violence (UNDP, Gevers *et al.* 2020).

GBV (gender-based violence) is any act of violence of one's will and right based on gender (IUCN, 2018). It means gender-based inequalities, which further lead to violence. This gender inequality can primarily affect women, resulting in unequal access to resources and suitable. The majority of the victims of GBV are women. One in three women faces GBV at some point in their lives, but in many countries, there is an even higher number of GBV (World Bank, 2019).

GBV occurs in all societies, including sexual assault, domestic violence, harassment, child marriage, rape, forced prostitution, etc. Environmental degradation can be the driving force of such violence. The scarcity of resources, displacement, and conflicts caused by climate crises can deepen the deep-rooted pre-existing gender inequalities. In such a crisis, GBV controls resources and reinforces privileges over resources. The effect is worsened by climate change (IUCN, 2020). This directly links to environmental degradation. However, few studies are still available supporting this relation. To know its impact, a study on 'Impact of Climate change on Gender-based Violence' is studied.

## OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

As the present study is based on qualitative research, it reviewed published articles, journals, reports, etc.

The objectives of the study include: -

- i) To study the effects of climate change on gender-based violence.
- ii) To identify the vulnerable group of gender-based violence due to climate change.

## EVIDENCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON GBV

Supporting the above objectives, the study reviewed some literature –

Gevers *et al.* (2020) studied the impact of climate change, which further increased the risk of violence against women (VAW). They learned about two wetland areas of Uganda that relied on agriculture as their livelihood. Due to natural disasters like heavy rainfall and prolonged floods, the people faced the loss of livestock, failure of crops, and food scarcity. Above this, the study found that protected natural disasters can increase the number of VAW victims. Due to the shortage of food, women and girls used to collect food or water from far-off places and thus often assaulted.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (2020) studied GBV and the Environment. It was found that environmental degradation, which resulted in resource scarcity, tension and conflicts, and displacement of people, can be the driving factors for GBV. Furthermore, most of the victims of GBV are environmental activists. Further, the study also found that GVB violates human rights and acts as a barricade to obtain the needs of conserving the environment and SDGs.

UN WOMEN (2015) highlighted the increasing number of disasters/hazards and their effect on people living near the Pacific Ocean (island). It was found that the disaster rate was three times higher in 2000-2009 than in 1980-1989. Its effect on people also increased from 1.2 million to 18 million (from 1980). The impacts on socio-economic factors like the destruction of homes, hospitals, and schools, as well as loss of property and livelihood, can threaten SDGs and, most importantly, increase sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) during and after the disaster. The study on six Pacific Island countries and territories about women experiencing violence found that about 60-80% experienced physical and sexual violence by spouses or others.

Shagun (2022) also found a relationship between disaster and violence. According to the UN report on disaster risk reduction, the risk of life of women affected by disaster often leads to increased homicide. The highest data on homicide was found in Central and South Asia, followed by East and Southeast Asia. In India, climate change impacts are primarily affected in the coastal states of West Bengal and Odisha. The increased number of floods and cyclones led people to displace their homes, making them more vulnerable to trafficking.

## EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON GBV

After analyzing the above literature, the study finds some impacts of climate change on GVB. They are –

- i) **Scarcity of food and water:** Whether there is a disaster or not, most women manage the lifeline of living, i.e., the kitchen. Even in peak disaster situations, women still tried to control the kitchen. They went to far-off places to collect food and water. When they went to collect it, many landowners/farmers insisted on having relations in exchange for food and water. Even if they negotiate about providing labor in exchange for food, they are often declined and use physical coercion to force sex (UNDP, Gevers *et al.*, 2020). Women and children even went up to 10kms range on foot to collect water and risk themselves with SGBV and other physical forms of violence (ICGBV, 2020).
- ii) **Traditional role of society:** Even though there is a loss of harvest and livestock and a scarcity of food and earnings, men used to occupy the traditional role of patriarchy (as providers). To cope with the pressure of such loss, they often chose to use alcohol and became more violent to women

(wives) and children (*ibid*, 2020). In evacuation time, women are not allowed to evacuate their homes without the consent of their partner/elderly family members. Even their traditional dress codes are not comfortable for mobility whenever an emergency exists due to a crisis; thus, the mortality rate is high during a disaster. In such conditions, women and girls are subjugated to SGBV and rape (Nellemann *et al.*, 2011).

- iii) **Forced child marriage:** During natural calamities like drought, child marriage is used as one of the coping mechanisms to avoid scarcity of food and earnings (IUCN, 2020). Traditional deep-rooted child marriage is the discrimination of gender norms and customs practiced in many countries (Freccero & Whiting, 2018). Around 650 million women still alive married before age 18, and about 12 million girls are married before 18 years each year (Girls Not Brides, n.d.). The survey of men and women aged 20-49 found that more percentage of women (77%) were married as compared to men (5%) before 18 years, and Niger was the country that had the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world (UNICEF, 2014). When families bear many crises and burdens to meet the basic amenities, the parents often marry their daughters to lessen their food intake. Thus, child marriage violates a child's right, takes away schooling privileges, is socially isolated, and has a greater chance of exposing violence/domestic violence (Freccero & Whiting, 2018).
- iv) **Displacement:** People displaced from their homes to mark them safe during and after the disaster. However, this displacement can lead to GBV. Due to evacuation, women who seek shelters are unsafe and exposed to rape, harassment, and discrimination. Even the frontline workers could not safeguard them as they were busy with the emergency and overwhelmed by the natural calamities. So, the victims (survivors) were nowhere to complain and seek help. Thus, losing a home, family protection, and fighting for livelihood can risk violence (UN WOMEN, 2015).

## VULNERABILITY OF GBV DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change cannot discriminate against anyone, but its impact is different in men, women, boys, or girls, and the coping mechanism is also different. Women are more affected than men in disasters as there is unequal power distribution or inequalities of gender over the management of resources and conservation (UN WOMEN, 2015). Men, women, and LGBTIs are victims of SGBV, but women and girls are the primary victims (UNHCR). The CARE Report 2020 also exhibited that all forms of GBV among women and girls are high during disasters and conflict (CARE, 2020).

During climate-related disasters like droughts, floods, cyclones, and storms, the most vulnerable groups are resource-poor communities. Because they depend on the availability of resources for their livelihood. Women are more prone to the victims of GBV in such crises (ICIMOD, 2009). Moreover, this vulnerability includes new forms of slavery and trafficking in times of disaster (Nellmann, 2022).

As an aftermath of natural disasters/calamities, GBV can cause several long-term health impacts like spreading infectious diseases of HIV/AIDS. Thus, stigma developed and acted as a barrier to social justice and cultural participation (IUCN, 2020). The impacts on SGBV from natural disasters are also severe and can affect a whole family, like HIV, unwanted pregnancies, mental and health problems, etc. (Stop VAW, 2013). Moreover, children exposed to such conditions are more likely to be abusive. Children are often kept at home to look for the younger children or sell flesh at night as sex workers. Thus, children are also more vulnerable to violence during disasters (UN WOMEN, 2012).

Above this, women actively participating in environment conservation and managing sustainable natural resources faced GBV and even sexual exploitation. This is the negative impact of conserving the environment and SDGs (IUCN, 2020). Moreover, girls who spent more time fetching water/food rarely went to school and even dropped out. The women also spend more energy finding food and water but still manage to do household chores and family responsibilities. They often felt weak due to engaging in such activities. Still, some men/partners responded to having sexual relations with them, often turning them into sexual abuse if they refused. In some cases, when men have to leave home searching for living/shelter, women and girls are left alone at home, which can often be a vulnerable factor to VAW and sexual assault (UNDP, Gevers *et al.*, 2020).

Moreover, every year, about 12,000-20,000 women and children (including boys) are kidnapped and turned into forced labor and brothel-based sex workers. Moreover, economically impoverished mountain families are often deceived with false remuneration of work and education, which often lead to forced labor and sex work. Women, children, older adults, and persons with disabilities are often vulnerable to violence due to natural disasters. Because they find difficulties in quickly seeking help (GBV AoR, 2018). Women are also often disheartened in learning life-saving skills and coping mechanisms like swimming and climbing trees. Thus, they are disadvantaged when emergency floods occur (Nellmann *et al.*, 2022).

## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

As the relationship between GBV and environmental degradation is rarely recognized, policymakers need specific action to consider the impact of climate change. The policymaker also needed to look at gender response to control/conservation of resources and relook at gender strategies of land rights (IUCN, 2020). Moreover, the long-term plan of socio-economic development of SDGs could not be achieved until or unless there is a reduction in violence, promoting gender equality and empowerment (UN WOMEN, 2015). More awareness programs on the vulnerability and risk of SGBV and trafficking in flood, drought, and other disaster-prone area. Moreover, increased participation and input of women in policy-making and programs related to climate change needed to be focused on (Nellemann *et al.*, 2022). Thus, gender awareness of gender-based research and its impact need to be prioritized.

## CONCLUSION

By analyzing all those qualitative data, we can conclude that GBV is increasing during and after disasters/calamities caused by climate change. Some factors that proved the increase of GBV caused by climate change are scarcity of food and water, the traditional role of society, forced child marriage, and displacement. In every area, women and girls are the victims of violence. Not only women, men, and LGBTIs are also vulnerable groups to GBV. Marginalized communities of hilly areas, older adults, and persons with disabilities are also victims of GBV. However, due to climate change, most women and girls are the major vulnerable group of GBV. Thus, policymakers need to focus on such issues while making policy recommendations.

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