

Women's Involvement in the Process of Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management: Understanding Gender Differences using Focused Group Discussions (English Presentation)

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1. Introduction:

Afghanistan is located in a zone of high-seismic activity. 70% of the territory is at risk of earthquakes. Extreme winter conditions and avalanches affect about 63% of the country. Flooding and mudslides are occur in the spring when snow starts melting. Between 1980-2002, more than 19000 people were killed and 7.5 million people were affected by disasters (ANDMA 2017). In Afghanistan the number of women victims from disasters are usually higher than men. See Figure 1. In the last major earthquake in November 2015, 70% of victims were women and young girls. Figure 1 shows that in rural areas the total number of women victims is higher.

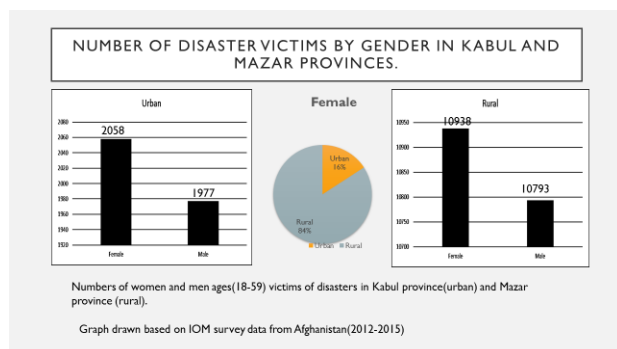


Figure 1. Disaster victims by gender in Kabul and Mazar.

The objective of this study is to better understand the barriers and factors which make Afghan women more vulnerable to natural disasters through the use of Focused Group Discussions (FGD). The main aim is to involve women in the Disaster Risk Management process and through this to map the realities in the field.. Furthermore the study will help us to better understand the possible threats, challenges and

opportunities for planning future prevention and mitigation engendered policy for Afghanistan.

2. Background

A review of relevant academic literature shows that women are more vulnerable than men during disasters (WHO, 2011; Erikson, 2014; Enarson,1998). According to several studies, there are some main causes or issues that make women more vulnerable including education, economic conditions and culture.

Educational issues:

Women are more vulnerable because they have less access to education and information that would allow them to manage disaster risks (WHO, 2011). In some cases, education and training are aimed for men. In this case, women may be reliant on men and their assessment of the risks during a crisis, regardless of whether men have the necessary knowledge or capacity (Eriksen, 2014). Incorrect assessments of risks have left women to evacuate with dependent children in situations of high risk. Generally, as education level rises, support for equal education opportunities for women also rise (Asia Foundation, 2016). Literacy rates in Afghanistan are low. Only 45 % of men and 18 % of Afghan women can read and write, which could help explain that support for women's education and training in Afghanistan is low, particularly in rural areas.

Income/ economic conditions:

Women tend to have lower incomes and are more likely to be economically dependent than men. In times

of food scarcity and drought, women will often give priority to their husbands—his nutritional needs will be met before hers (Neumayer and Plümpe 2007). Single women and mothers tend to be poorer relative to men and may not have the necessary resources to respond to and recover from disasters (Enarson, 1998). The Asia Foundation (2016) carried out a survey in 2016. They found that the respondents felt that women should not be allowed to work outside of their homes because of insecurity in the country and other reasons. This means that women's contribution to the household income is very low, and in the case of single mothers and widows, it makes them more vulnerable.

Cultural issues:

Cultural issues can make women more vulnerable in disaster situations. Enarson (1998) writes that women's vulnerability to disasters is also shaped by traditional gender roles, power and privilege and secondary responsibilities such as child care. In many cases women don't have the courage to escape without taking permission and guidance from their husbands or other elders (Parkinson 2014). In Afghanistan, women culturally cannot exercise their rights fully. Even during a disaster, they should follow their husbands or elders' order or permission, even if this endangers their lives.

3. Focus Group Discussions in Gender Studies

Several studies have highlighted the usefulness of FGDs for feminism and postmodernism research studies. FGDs are a good tool to find a range of responses which provide a greater understanding of the attitudes, behavior, opinions or perceptions of participants on certain issues (Hennink 2007). FGDs allow for good group dynamics and help the researcher capture shared lived experiences (Madriz 2003). FGDs create data from multiple voices instead of one individual (Madriz 2003). According to Madriz (2003) women's gathering and sharing with other women have the potential to result in actions and movements that

promote social change. Thus, in this study we use FGDs to explore barriers and other factors that make women more vulnerable to disasters.

4. Methodology

Data collection for this study includes a literature review, analysis of disaster statistics from the Afghan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA), and interviews with non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and government officials. We collect qualitative data through a series of FGDs in two local communities in Kabul and Mazar Provinces.

5. Anticipated outcomes

At the time of writing this abstract, I am preparing to carry out the FGDs which will provide insights to the barriers and factors which make Afghan women more vulnerable to natural disasters. The results of the FGDs will be presented during the DPRI Seminar.

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