

## Chapter 61

# Disaster, Vulnerability, and Violence Against Women: Global Findings and a Research Agenda for Bangladesh

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### ABSTRACT

*Studies of natural disasters have adequately focused on gendered aspect of disaster and women's vulnerability and offered suitable suggestions though only few of these have focused on the issue of the relation between disaster and violence against women. By undertaking meta-analysis of cross-cultural studies, this paper aims to provide an overview of connections between disaster, women's vulnerability and violence against women and to highlight the importance and the relevance of similar researches in Bangladesh. Natural threats are real and moderated by existing socio-economic arrangements and cultural norms in Bangladesh where gender relationships are unequal and violence prone. Therefore it is expected that the lessons of international experiences and insights will help to develop a gendered research framework to understand 'how violence against women is increasing following disasters' in the context of Bangladesh. And finally, that would pave the way for policy options to form a better co-existence for both men and women which would be more equal, dignified and violence free.*

### INTRODUCTION

The people of Bangladesh have been at the mercy of natural disasters since their birth. Almost every year Bangladesh faces different types of disasters attack which are gradually intensifying by climatic changes and becoming more threatening for people especially for women. From 1971 to 2005, 171 disasters were happened and more women died than men in disasters because of their lower economic status and

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-6195-8.ch061

social capital (Women's Environment and Development Organization, 2008). Only in the 1991 cyclone in Bangladesh 90 per cent of the victims were female (Ikeda, 1995). During this cyclone, 'one desperate father, unable to hold on to both his son and daughter, let go of his daughter, acknowledging that he did so because his son had to carry on the family line (Fothergill, 1998). Not only in Bangladesh but also worldwide girls and women are 14 times more likely to die or be injured in a disaster than boys and men due to gender based inequalities (Chew & Ramdas, 2004). Though disasters affect both women and men but the burden of coping with disasters falls heavily on women. During and aftermath of a disaster women and girls face a heavier load of domestic works as they are responsible for providing the family with its basic nutrition, yet they rarely have access to and control over the resources (Nasreen, 1995, 2008). In rural areas they are even more vulnerable since they are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood. Consequently women suffer more than men from poverty, hunger, malnutrition, economic crises, environmental degradation; health related problems, insecurity and become victim of violence (Nasreen, 2012). The main aim of this literature review is to see 'how disaster influences violence against women' and to understand 'to what extent it is necessary to do similar researches in Bangladesh'. From past few decades a number of significant researches have already been done to understand the gendered perspective of disaster in Bangladesh and proposed effective suggestions as well as strategies to mitigate and to cope with such situation though only few researches have focused on "understanding the relation between disaster and violence against women in Bangladesh". Though some global researches have proved that- violence against women is increasing following disasters in developing countries (Enarson, 2000, 2012; AusAID, 2008; Molin Valdés, 2009; Dasgupta, Siriner, & Partha, 2010; Parkinson, 2011). At the same time researches on 'violence against women' have adequately focused on revealing causes, reasons of violence and on finding out effective ways to reduce violence but still one in every three women face violence in their life time throughout the world (World Health Organization, 2016). In this circumstances this topic presents a valuable connection for practical and academic exploration, and also representing a space where the gap of studying 'disaster' and 'violence against women' jointly manifest, and both create and reveal the way forward to reduce women's vulnerability to reduce/stop violence against women.

## **OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS**

**Disaster:** Disaster is a difficult concept to define; existing definitions tend to be either too broad or too narrow. However this paper will mainly focus on natural disasters. Natural disasters refer to disasters of certain magnitude caused by natural forces affecting whole populations. For example: cyclone, tornado, flood, riverbank erosion, coastal erosion, landslide, drought, heavy rainfall, bushfire, heatwave etc.

**Vulnerability:** Vulnerability to natural disasters is a composite of numerous social and biophysical variables, and it is established long before disasters strike in infrastructure, preparedness planning, economic status, education level, social networks, and other available systems, with each capable of being shaped by gender (Fordham, 1999, pp.15-36).

**Violence against Women:** Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life' is called Violence against women (United Nations, 1993). Throughout the paper, unless specified differently, the term "women" refers to females of all ages, including girls.

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