


Chapter 2

Gender and Disasters: The Position of Vulnerable Groups in Disaster Processes

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the importance of understanding the social dimensions of disasters in the context of natural disaster events and structural social inequalities. Disasters not only cause physical destruction but also deepen pre-existing gender-based inequalities in society, leading to multidimensional social crises. The study examines the situation of vulnerable groups in detail through the pre-disaster, disaster and reconstruction phases. This comprehensive analysis is supported by case studies where natural disasters and gender inequality are clearly evident. Consequently, it has been concluded that disasters are a social dynamic that reproduces and deepens existing social inequalities. The study concluded with recommendations for restructuring disaster policies in terms of gender sensitivity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, multi-dimensional global problems such as the climate crisis, rapidly increasing disaster events, and existing structural societal inequalities have made disaster management and understanding of the social impacts of disasters a critical issue. Disasters not only cause physical destruction and debilitating effects but also deepen existing gender-based inequalities and vulnerabilities within society, thereby transforming into a social crisis. Groups with structural disadvantages stemming from socio-economic and cultural positions, particularly women, older people, dis-

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abled people and LGBTQ+ individuals, experience disproportionate vulnerability during disaster processes due to conditions arising from their position in society rather than the direct effects of the disaster itself.

The fact that disaster management and response processes are often shaped by male-dominated and patriarchal structures hinders the inclusion of vulnerable groups' knowledge, experience and needs in decision-making mechanisms, thereby complicating the achievement of social justice in disaster management. Disasters increase the care, reproduction, and household management responsibilities socially attributed to women within vulnerable groups, both quantitatively and qualitatively; this deepens their physical, economic, and psychological vulnerability. The disproportionate impact of disasters on vulnerable groups can be observed across different geographical areas, from Canada to Nepal, revealing that gender inequality and vulnerability are exacerbated during disaster processes. Therefore, the relationship between disasters and gender should be assessed not only in terms of these vulnerable groups being more affected, but also in terms of how disasters reproduce existing social inequalities. This study aims to examine in depth the structural inequalities and multi-layered vulnerabilities faced by women and other vulnerable groups during the pre-disaster, disaster and post-disaster periods, because disaster processes are in no way gender-neutral. In this context, the study assesses the relationship between gender and disasters not only in terms of victimization, but also in terms of how it reveals structural inequalities.

The study is structured systematically to present this comprehensive analysis. The second section presents the fundamental conceptual framework, including the distinction between gender and sex, the construction of social roles, and the relationship with the patriarchal order. The third section examines the situation of vulnerable groups in detail through the three stages of disaster processes: Pre-Disaster Phase (inequality in access to information and male-dominated planning), Impact Moment of Disaster Phase (evacuation difficulties, physical and psychosocial risks) and Post-Disaster and Recovery Process (inequalities in the recovery process, increased burden of responsibility and security gaps). The fourth section addresses the gender inequalities that emerge in the face of natural disasters in different parts of the world. The study concludes with the “Conclusion and Recommendations” section, which presents proposals for restructuring disaster policies in terms of gender sensitivity, based on the findings obtained.

2. GENDER AND DISASTER

Gender, distinct from an individual's biological sex at birth, is a concept used to describe the social and cultural definition of women and men, the ways in which

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