

# EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON PAKISTANI WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

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## ABSTRACT

Climate change is a multifaceted threat to global public health that is disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations such as women in Pakistan. This article explores the gender-specific mental health consequences of climate change by highlighting how socioeconomic inequities, maternal vulnerabilities, limited healthcare infrastructure, and socio-political instability exacerbate the crisis. It emphasises on the urgent need for integrated, gender-sensitive, and mental health-inclusive climate policies, and also advocates for increased investment, stigma reduction, and grassroots psychosocial interventions to empower women as both recipients and providers of care. The article further aims to prompt critical dialogue and action among researchers, policymakers, and healthcare professionals for Pakistan to transform its climate response into a medium for mental health reform, gender equity, and societal resilience.

## KEYWORDS

Climate Change; Environmental Health; Female; Health Inequities; Health Policy; Mental Health; Pakistan; Psychosocial Support Systems.

## INTRODUCTION

The urgency of climate change cannot be overstated. Its impact is felt by everyone worldwide, regardless of wealth, development status, or stability. It is crucial to work collaboratively to mitigate the effects of climate change and protect the populations most at risk. There is a strong and intricate connection between women's health and climate change, exacerbated by prevailing gender disparities.

### An Unequal Burden

Research and evidence from various regions show that climate change and severe weather events have adverse effects on women's health.<sup>1,2</sup> Women and girls disproportionately bear the burden of climate-related impacts, further escalating existing gender inequalities and posing unique challenges to their livelihoods, wellbeing, and security.<sup>2,3</sup>

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report, pregnancy and motherhood increase vulnerability to heat stress, communicable diseases, food-borne infections, and air pollution.<sup>3</sup> These environmental factors are linked to adverse pregnancy outcomes.<sup>3,4</sup> Additionally, women and girls are more likely to experience food insecurity, particularly during pregnancy and breastfeeding.<sup>5</sup>

Urgent access to medical care and therapy for these groups is essential, not only for improving mental health outcomes but also for survival. Accessing care extends beyond individual wellbeing, as it also supports broader community resilience.<sup>1</sup>

### Mental Health Support in Emergencies

Over the past decade, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has developed various practical guides to establish and expand mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies.<sup>1</sup> The adaptation of the WHO's Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) has trained general health workers to identify and manage common mental health disorders, a strategy particularly vital in humanitarian crises.<sup>1</sup>

### Pakistan's Healthcare Landscape

In Pakistan, the healthcare system faces significant challenges that undermine the delivery of effective health services, including mental health care. One major issue is inadequate healthcare funding. Pakistan's health expenditure stands at approximately US Dollar (USD) 38 per capita, which is markedly lower than regional peers such as India spends USD 57, the Philippines devotes USD 165, and per capita health spending in Ghana is USD 85.<sup>6</sup>

Political instability, corruption, and law and order issues further impact healthcare delivery, especially mental health services during crises. Nevertheless, strong political will during emergencies can create opportunities to develop high-quality, sustainable mental health systems.<sup>1</sup>

### Empowering Women and Communities

Women's wellbeing is fundamentally linked to family and community welfare. Supporting women's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural health is critical.<sup>7</sup> In low- and middle-income countries like Pakistan, barriers such as infrastructural limitations and cultural stigma impede access to mental health support.<sup>7</sup> Thus, empowering paramedical staff and community volunteers to provide ongoing mental health support is crucial.

### Policy and Social Reforms for Mental Health Access

Pakistan urgently needs to address systemic policy challenges that restrict access to mental healthcare. Tackling income inequality, gender disparities, rural-urban divides, and stigma can significantly enhance mental health outcomes. Investing in mental health not only helps individuals cope with hardship but also strengthens national resilience and recovery.<sup>8</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Climate change is no longer a distant threat, but it is an existing and escalating crisis that disproportionately affects the mental health and wellbeing of women, particularly in vulnerable regions like Pakistan. Women are the pillars of families and communities, and uniquely positioned at the front line of climate-induced hardships. Addressing their mental health needs is not only a matter of equity but also of resilience and sustainability.

### Recommendations

By integrating gender-sensitive policies, investing in mental health infrastructure, and empowering local healthcare providers, Pakistan has the prospects of building a future where women's mental health is protected, despite environmental challenges. Thus, immediate and coordinated action is required to ensure that the burden of climate change does not exacerbate existing inequalities, but serves as a catalyst for transformative health, social, and policy reforms for the nation.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None

### FUNDING

none

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