

**SPECIAL ARTICLE:**

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

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The urgency of climate change cannot be overstated. Its impact is felt by everyone worldwide, regardless of wealth, development status, or stability. Hence it is crucial to work together to decrease the effects of climate change and protecting the populations at most risk. There is a strong and intricate connection between the health of women and the changing climate, which is exacerbated by the prevailing gender disparities.

Research and evidence from various regions indicate that the climatic changes and severe weather conditions have adverse effects on the health of women (1 & 2 ). Women and girls bear the brunt of the effects of the changing climate, escalating underlying gender inequalities and posing unique challenges to their livelihoods, wellbeing, and security.

The Climate Change Policy (2022 IPCC report ) indicates that being pregnant and being a mother can increase susceptibility to heat, communicable diseases, food-borne infections, and air pollution. Adverse pregnancy outcomes are connected to environmental factors. Women and girls are more likely to experience food insecurity, especially when pregnant or breastfeeding.

These women urgently require access to medical care and therapy for their disorders that usually limits their functionality. Accessing care is far more than just improving mental health, but it may also be the way for survival.

Over the past decade, the World Health Organization (WHO) has worked with partners to create a variety of practical guides aimed at establishing and expanding psychosocial and mental health support in emergencies. Additionally, WHO has modified the "mhGAP Programme" to train general health workers in identifying and providing initial support for common mental disorders, making it applicable in humanitarian emergencies.

Pakistan's healthcare system struggles with various obstacles that undermine its capacity to offer sufficient and effective healthcare services to its people. One of the significant challenges is inadequate funding. Pakistan spends approximately 38 US Dollars (USD) per capita on health

expenditure, which is significantly less than other developing countries. For comparison, India, the Philippines, and Ghana spend 57, 165, and 85 USD per capita on healthcare, respectively. Pakistan's economy is classified as developing, ranking 24th based on GDP using purchasing power parity and 46th based on nominal GDP. As of 2023, the population of Pakistan stands at 241.5 million.

Unfortunately, in Pakistan, political upheavals, rampant corruption, and law and order situations have significantly impacted the delivery of health services, especially mental health care during crises. When there is strong political will, emergencies can serve as opportunities to develop high-quality mental health services.

"The well-being of women is closely connected to the welfare of their families and communities. It is essential to provide mental health support for cognitive, behavioural, and emotional well-being. Accessing mental health support in low- and middle-income countries is challenging due to infrastructure and cultural barriers. Efforts should concentrate on offering continuous guidance and support for paramedical staff and community volunteers who are trained to provide mental health support."

Pakistan needs to focus on addressing policy challenges that hinder access to mental health care. We need to urgently work on removing obstacles such as income disparities, social class, gender disparities, age-related barriers, rural and urban distinctions, symptoms of mental disorders, and the stigma surrounding mental health.

Allocating resources to enhance mental health not only aids individuals in coping with significant distress and hardship, but it also contributes to the support of a nation's resurgence.

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