SOCIAL PRISM

Volume 3(2), 2026, 404-423
Online ISSN: 3006-8886
Print ISSN: 3006-8878

Gendered Dimensions of Climate-Induced Displacement: Women's Vulnerability, Agency, and Resilience in Pakistan

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Abstract

Climate induced displacement has emerged as one of the growing challenges in Pakistan, where climate related hazards like recurrent floods, droughts, heatwaves and the challenges of gender inequalities and socioeconomic inequalities are interlocking. This study explores gender-specific aspects of climate-induced displacement on three interlinked dimensions: vulnerability, Agency, and Resilience of women. Qualitative research is used in the study with a qualitative descriptive research design with secondary data as the only source of data. Thematic analysis was used, with relevant academic literature, government policies and reports, publications from international organizations, NGO's reports, disaster assessments and credible documentary sources being purposively selected and analyzed thematically. The findings reveal that women are facing disproportionate vulnerabilities during displacement as a result of limited mobility, livelihood insecurity, unequal access to resources, disrupted healthcare and reproductive services and inadequate sanitation, increased protection risks and limited participation in displacement decision making. The results, however, question the image of women as only passive victims of climate catastrophes. Women show agency in the diversification of livelihood, in managing household affairs, social networks, care taking, the participation in the community and through coping strategies developed locally. Their resilience is determined by their individual abilities and by the systems they have available to them to support them, but they are still limited by structural gender inequalities and a lack of institutional support. The study also finds a mismatch between the design and implementation of gender-responsive policies and practices on climate change, in terms of women's genuine involvement in disaster preparedness, displacement planning, recovery, and adaptation. The study suggests that any climate-displacement policies in Pakistan should go beyond a vulnerability-centric approach, and see women as vulnerable, rights-bearing citizens, and agents of resilience and adaptation.

Keywords: Climate-induced displacement; Gendered vulnerability; Women's agency; Women's resilience; Pakistan

Introduction

The impacts of climate change have been steadily evolving into social, economic and human security issues. Climate related hazards, such as extreme floods, droughts, heat waves, irregular rainfall and more can lead to the destruction of livelihoods and homes, to loss of access to health and education services, and cause people and communities to move to other areas. Climate-

Received 22 March 2026; Revised 16 April 2026; Accepted 24 April 2026; Published (online) 29 April 2026
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Corresponding Author Email: kalyan.singh@gcu.edu.pk
DOI: https://doi.org/10.69671/socialprism.3.2.2026.293

Online ISSN: 3006-8886
Print ISSN: 3006-8878

induced displacement is thus not only a result of environmental change, but also a function of inequalities of access to resources, mobility, decision-making, livelihoods and social protection in place. There is more recent evidence that climate-related disasters are increasingly playing a significant role in driving human mobility, especially in nations that are highly exposed and have low adaptive capacity. Climate change and socio-economic vulnerabilities have made displacement a key concern in Pakistan, necessitating policies that safeguard the rights and socio-economic livelihoods of people affected by displacement and also anticipate future patterns of climate mobility (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2024).

Pakistan is one of the significant contexts in which to look at gendered aspects of climate induced displacement. The country is extremely vulnerable to flooding, drought, heatwaves, shifts in precipitation and other climate hazards, while poverty and livelihood insecurity, coupled with poor infrastructure and social inequality, limits adaptive capacity. The devastating floods in 2022 showed the extent of this vulnerability, impacting around 33 million people and causing significant loss of lives, homes, agricultural land, infrastructure and livelihoods. Services, reproductive health services, sanitation, security, education and livelihoods were particularly disrupted for women and girls. For instance, in 2022, hundreds of thousands of IDPs inhabited relief camps or with host communities, with women of reproductive age at greater risk due to the damage caused to health facilities and services (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2022).

Gender-based displacement due to environmental factors is a result of the interplay of environmental exposure with existing social dynamics. In Pakistan, women often have unequal access to land and property, income and work, education, information, health and family decision making. These disparities can worsen in times of disaster as displaced people lose access to social networks and livelihoods, and depend on household and institutional support. The recent study on the floods in Pakistan (2022) shows that limited mobility, traditional gender roles, unequal asset ownership and unequal access to resources and decision making are all related to women's vulnerability. However, the evidence also suggests that women had important capacities and knowledge that could be utilized for community resilience (Iqbal et al., 2024).

However, it is important to note that the idea of women only as vulnerable victims may ignore those women who are capable of exerting agency. Climate induced displacement does not simply mean loss and marginalization for women, but a process of negotiation, of sustaining households, of livelihood diversification, of maintaining social networks, of involvement in relief efforts, and of contributing to community recovery. In a study of the climate-induced migrants' experiences in flood-affected communities in Pakistan, researchers found that although women's experiences of increased risks during migration, their local knowledge, care-giving roles, livelihood diversification and social networks are important disaster-management capacities (2024). It implies that vulnerability and agency is possible: that structural inequalities may limit women's options, while women themselves devise ways of coping with, and reacting to, those inequalities.

Resilience is then a key concept for comprehending women's experiences of climate-induced displacement. Resilience must not be seen as simply being able to endure disasters. Instead, it includes the ability to respond to disruption, adjust to changing conditions, organize social and economic resources, restore livelihoods and engage in recovery and transformation processes. Women are no longer just a target group for adaptation initiatives, but are also viewed as a force

Online ISSN: 3006-8886
Print ISSN: 3006-8878

of resilience in the changing climate. It is important to highlight the woman's ability to contribute to transformation in climate adaptation, disaster-risk reduction, and inclusive recovery when institutional structures are designed to recognize and promote women's capacities, as emphasized by UNDP (2025).

However, there are marked disparities in the displacement and recovery experiences. The recent studies conducted on climate induced migration in Pakistan indicate that women's economic status, socio-cultural status, health risks, and their weak voice in migration decision making can further amplify their vulnerability to social injustice. Migration decisions continue to be patriarchal in many contexts, which may result in a restricted role for women in determining the location, timing and circumstances of migration (2024). The displacement can then perpetuate or exacerbate gender inequities, and not necessarily improve social equality.

The repercussions are not just physical. Girls' education, women's livelihoods, health services and social security may be affected by climate related disasters. The experiences of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after the 2022 floods suggest that serious disruption in girls' education resulted from damage to schools, inadequate sanitation, displacement and psychological distress. (2024) Likewise, increased incidence of gender-based violence (GBV) has been recorded during flood events, due to the vulnerability of women to poverty, displacement, overcrowded shelter, weak institutional protection, and gender inequality (2024). These interrelated consequences show that the displacement caused by climate change should be analyzed in a gender responsive way and not as a gender-blind process.

In this context, the present study titled “Gendered Dimensions of Climate-Induced Displacement: Vulnerability, Agency, and Resilience of Women in Pakistan” aims at critically analyzing the gender differences of climate-induced displacement and women's response, negotiation and recovery to such displacement. The study adopts a qualitative method and the secondary data sources are drawn from academic journal articles, government documents, policy documents, international documents, NGO documents, and other documents and publications that are relevant to the study. It analyses three interrelated aspects: vulnerability, agency and resilience, as well as the effectiveness of institutional and policy interventions, through a thematic analysis. The study then transcends the victim perspective of displaced women and acknowledges that they are social actors who have capacities, knowledge, and strategies which is influenced by the gendered structures and socioeconomic environments. This could help in creating a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon of climate-induced displacement in Pakistan and emphasize the need for gender-specific approaches to adaptation, disaster management, displacement policy and recovery.

Statement of the Problem

Climate-induced displacement has become a serious problem in Pakistan with recurrent floods, droughts, heatwaves, etc. In Pakistan, the increasing frequency of floods, droughts, heatwaves and other climate-related hazards are exacerbating the climate-induced displacement problem. But it is not felt equally as can be exacerbated by existing gender inequalities, such as limited mobility, land access, economic resources, livelihood insecurity, limited access to healthcare, care responsibilities and participation in decision-making for women. However, emphasizing women's vulnerability can be at the expense of neglecting their coping abilities and contributions

Online ISSN: 3006-8886
Print ISSN: 3006-8878

to household and community resilience. While the effects of climate disasters in Pakistan have been documented in existing literature, there is a need for a more integrated understanding of the intersection between vulnerability, agency and resilience in the experience of climate-displaced women. This is exacerbated by the weaknesses in the gender responsive displacement policies and institutional responses. Thus, the aim of this study is to analyze the gendered aspects of the displacement caused due to climate change in Pakistan qualitatively using secondary data.

Scope of the Study

The study highlights the gender aspects of climate induced displacement in the context of Pakistan and emphasizes on the vulnerability, agency and resilience of women. It only analysis secondary sources like peer-reviewed academic papers, government policies, reports, documents from international organizations and NGOs, disaster and climate assessments, and credible media reports. The study takes a broad view on climate related displacement, including the effects of hazards including floods, droughts, climate change and weather events and livelihoods disruptions; it explores the implications of these on women's mobility, livelihoods, health, security, decision making, coping, and recovery participation. Geographically it encompasses the study of the national context of Pakistan as opposed to one province or district. It is not a primary interview, survey or field study and therefore emphasizes on the analysis of patterns and evidence already recorded in sources.

Significance of the Study

This study is important due to its contribution to the understanding of displacement in the context of climate change in Pakistan by breaking the stereotype of climate-induced displacement in which women are only seen as climate disaster victims. The study explores vulnerability as well as agency and resilience, showcasing structural inequalities that limit displaced women's capacities, and the ways in which they negotiate, adapt and recover from displacement. The results may inform and shape academic debates about gender, climate change, displacement and feminist perspectives on resilience and offer valuable inputs for policy makers, disaster management institutions, development agencies and feminist practice. Specifically, the study can contribute to more inclusive climate adaptation, disaster-risk reduction, displacement, social-protection and recovery policies, and consider women's needs and capacities, as well as women's role in the construction of resilient communities.

Research Objectives

Following are the research objectives:

- To examine the gendered dimensions of climate-induced displacement in Pakistan, with particular emphasis on the vulnerabilities experienced by women and girls.

- To analyze how displaced women in Pakistan demonstrate agency and negotiate social, economic, and institutional constraints in the context of climate-related displacement.

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- To critically explore the forms of resilience, coping strategies, and institutional support available to women affected by climate-induced displacement in Pakistan through an analysis of secondary sources.

Research Questions

Following are the research questions:

- How does climate-induced displacement affect women and girls differently in Pakistan, particularly in terms of their social, economic, and physical vulnerabilities?

- How do women affected by climate-induced displacement exercise agency and negotiate the social, economic, and institutional challenges associated with displacement?

- What forms of resilience and coping strategies are evident among climate-displaced women in Pakistan, and how adequately do existing policies and institutional responses address their gender-specific needs?

Research Methodology

Research Approach

This project uses a qualitative research methodology to explore the gendered nature of climate-induced displacement in Pakistan, focusing on the vulnerabilities, agency and resilience of women. A qualitative approach is suitable for the study because the study targets the meanings, patterns, experiences, social relations, institutional conditions and gendered processes of climate-induced displacement and does not require the quantification and measurement of these phenomena. Qualitative research has merit for a variety of purposes, such as understanding the interpretation of social phenomena as they occur in their context and understanding the impact of social inequalities on people's experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study looks in particular at the interaction between gender inequalities in Pakistan and the impact of the climate-related hazards (such as floods, droughts, extreme weather events and related livelihood disruption). Both population displacement can be a consequence of climate impacts and women and other socially disadvantaged groups may be affected more by climate impacts than others, as acknowledged by the National Adaptation Plan of Pakistan. Thus, a qualitative approach allows the researcher to go beyond figures, and reflects the researcher's questioning of the gendered structures and processes that account for women's vulnerability, their agency and their resilience.

Research Design

The study will use qualitative descriptive research based on Secondary Data and Document Analysis. The qualitative descriptive design is appropriate since the research seeks to provide an account of women's experiences and reactions to climate-induced displacement in a systematic and contextually grounded manner and does not alter variables or collect primary data. The study

Online ISSN: 3006-8886
Print ISSN: 3006-8878

will analyse the current documents for common themes around vulnerability, agency (how much or how little), coping strategies, resilience, and institutional responses.

It will be based on only secondary sources and document analysis will be the main method of data collection. As information about social phenomena, institutional practices, policies, events, and experiences, documents can be valuable qualitative data sources, as explained by Bowen (2009). Document analysis is the process of systematically examining and interpreting documents to derive meaningful conclusions and trends from the documents available.

This design is especially appropriate for the present study, due to the existence of abundant documentation of climate change, disasters, displacement, gender inequality and women's resilience in the context of Pakistan. For instance, UNDP Pakistan and the National Commission on the Status of Women have conducted in-depth policy and sectoral review of the gendered aspects of climate change and women's vulnerabilities and resiliencies. Likewise, UN Women documentation highlights the issues of displacement and vulnerability due to disasters as matters of concern to Pakistani women.

Sources of Secondary Data

The study will use a purposively selected body of secondary documents relevant to climate-induced displacement and its gendered consequences in Pakistan. The sources will include:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles and academic books;
- Government policies, reports, and official documents;
- Reports published by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and Provincial Disaster Management Authorities (PDMAs);
- Pakistan's climate-change and adaptation policies;
- Reports from UN agencies, particularly UN Women, UNDP, UNHCR, and other relevant international organizations;
- Reports from international and national non-governmental organizations;
- Reports concerning floods, droughts, climate migration, internal displacement, and disaster response;
- Gender and climate-change assessments;
- Relevant newspaper and media reports from credible sources; and
- Other publicly available institutional and documentary material directly relevant to the research questions.

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Print ISSN: 3006-8878

Relevance, credibility, authenticity and information adequacy will be used to guide the selection of documents. Documents will be added where they directly relate to climate-induced displacement, women's vulnerability, women's agency, women's resilience, gender inequality, disaster response, climate adaptation, or institutional response in Pakistan context.

Sampling Technique

The types of documents that will be used in the study will be selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is used because the researcher is not trying to get a representative sample of documents, but is trying to find documents that contain information that can directly answer the research questions. Documents, therefore, will be purposefully chosen based on the inclusion criteria.

The inclusion criteria will include documents that:

1. Focus on Pakistan or contain substantial evidence concerning Pakistan;
2. Address climate change, climate-related disasters, displacement, migration, or disaster-induced mobility;
3. Contain information concerning women, gender relations, vulnerability, agency, resilience, or coping;
4. Are produced by credible academic, governmental, international, or civil-society institutions; and
5. Provide sufficient substantive information for qualitative interpretation.

Data Collection Procedure

Documents will be systematically reviewed for data collection. First, the relevant academic publications, government documents, policy papers, institutional reports and trustworthy media sources will be identified. The researcher will then review the documents on the basis of the inclusion criteria developed. Appropriate cut-outs will be isolated and organized on the three main analytical axes of the study: vulnerability, agency and resilience.

The documentary material will then be used to create a research corpus. The documents will be analysed not only for explicit references to women, but also for the representation of gender roles, the existing patriarchal structures, access to resources, mobility restrictions, decision-making power, livelihoods, social protection and institutional responses. This is critical because gender is not just one of the demographic features of any displacement situation but also can shape the nature of experiences and negotiations of climate risks.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis will be used in the analysis of secondary data selected in the study. Thematic analysis is suitable when the researcher can detect patterns and themes within a wide range of qualitative data to categorize, interpret and report them. Thematic analysis is a flexible

Online ISSN: 3006-8886
Print ISSN: 3006-8878

qualitative approach to identifying and interpreting patterns in data as described by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The analysis will be carried out in the following stages:

1. **Familiarization with the data:** The researcher will read and reread the selected documents to develop a comprehensive understanding of the material.

2. **Initial coding:** Relevant passages will be coded according to concepts associated with women's vulnerability, agency, displacement, coping, resilience, gender norms, livelihoods, access to resources, and institutional support.

3. **Development of themes:** Related codes will be grouped into broader themes and sub-themes.

4. **Review of themes:** The themes will be compared across different documents to identify similarities, differences, contradictions, and recurring patterns.

5. **Definition and interpretation of themes:** The final themes will be clearly defined and interpreted in relation to the research questions.

6. **Synthesis of findings:** The findings will be synthesized to explain how climate-induced displacement intersects with gender relations in Pakistan and how women simultaneously experience vulnerability and demonstrate agency and resilience.

The analysis will therefore not treat women solely as passive victims of climate change. Instead, it will examine the relationship between structural vulnerability and women's capacity to act, negotiate, adapt, resist, and rebuild**.** This is particularly important for the present study because existing research on Pakistan emphasizes both women's disproportionate vulnerability to climate-related disasters and their potential role as agents of climate resilience.

Analytical Framework

The analysis will be organized around three interconnected analytical categories:

Analytical Dimension	Key Areas of Analysis
Women's Vulnerability	Poverty, livelihood insecurity, displacement, mobility restrictions, access to health and sanitation, gender-based violence, loss of property/resources, care responsibilities
Women's Agency	Decision-making, participation, livelihood adaptation, collective action, negotiation, leadership, access to resources and services
Women's Resilience	Coping strategies, adaptation, livelihood reconstruction, social networks, community support, institutional assistance, recovery and rebuilding

These categories will not be considered as totally distinct. Instead, the study will focus on the interplay of vulnerability, agency and resilience. For example, patriarchal norms might place

Online ISSN: 3006-8886
Print ISSN: 3006-8878

women at risk, while also influencing the ways women engage in displacement and mobilization in response to climate-related disaster events.

The trustworthiness of the Study

The study will use the source triangulation in order to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Academic research, government documents, international organizations, NGO reports, or other document sources that are credible will be compared. According to Bowen (2009), documentary analysis can be supported with the comparison and triangulation of documentary evidence.

In addition, the researcher will recognize the difference between evidence produced by governmental institutions, international organizations, NGOs, and academic researchers, including the possibility that each may have varying institutional goals and viewpoints. A mix of contradictory findings will not be automatically dismissed, but rather critically analyzed to draw a more complex picture of women's experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are important, although no interviews, surveys or direct interaction with human participants is involved in the research. The researcher will accurately represent the arguments and findings of the original authors and institutions and will give proper APA 7th edition citations for all secondary sources. Sensitive and confidential information on displaced women, gender-based violence, poverty and vulnerability will be shared in a non-identifying and respectful manner.

The study will also not conceptually box women impacted by climate-induced displacement as victims. Their agency, knowledge, coping mechanisms and actions to support household and community resilience will be addressed. This is aligned with gender mainstreaming in climate research which prioritizes women's meaningful engagement in decision-making on climate resilience and displacement.

Review of the Literature

Climate-induced displacement has become a significant outcome of the interplay between climate hazards, social and economic disparities and weak adaptive capacity. Displacement is not caused by climate change alone, but only when it combines with people's livelihoods, assets, institutions, social networks and capacity to adapt. Climate-related migration and displacement is a process that is very much shaped by social context, gender and power dynamics and resource access (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2022). Women may be affected more than men as they may not be able to evacuate, move or receive support due to the effects of caring responsibilities, limited movement, lack of household autonomy, and cultural norms. This is especially significant in the context of Pakistan where recurring floods, droughts, heatwaves, glacier events and water insecurity co-occur with poverty and gender inequalities. According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2021), Pakistan is very vulnerable to climate change hazards, which are already impacting communities, livelihoods, agriculture, water resources and human development. In recent years, there are also regional examples that floods and extreme

Online ISSN: 3006-8886
Print ISSN: 3006-8878

heat are emerging as new climate threats in Asia (World Meteorological Organization [WMO], 2024).

Climate-Induced Displacement in Pakistan

The context of Pakistan is a very important context for examining climate-induced displacement due to the scale and frequency of climate-related disasters. The floods in 2022 were among the worst humanitarian disasters in the country with about 33 million people affected by the floods and millions of people displaced internally. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2023) estimated that the floods caused around 8.2 million internal displacements and Pakistan experienced one of the largest disaster-displacement events in the last decade. The Post-Disaster Needs Assessment also estimated damages in excess of US$14.9 billion and economic losses of about US$15.2 billion, reflecting the wide damage caused by the disaster on housing, agriculture, livelihoods, infrastructure and public services (Government of Pakistan et al., 2022).

Displacement after disasters is increasingly recognized in the literature as being temporary, repeated, or extended. IDMC (2025) reports that over one million people were still displaced in Pakistan more than one year after the floods of 2022, and recurrent flooding and other hazards may result in communities being repeatedly exposed to displacement. The long-term displacement has repercussions for livelihood recovery, housing security, access to services and social protection. Recent modeling studies also show that the spatial variation in flood displacement in Pakistan is not only determined by the exposure to floods but also by socioeconomic vulnerabilities and settlement characteristics (Kam et al., 2025). The results defy the notion that displacement is merely a direct transfer from a dangerous to a safer place. Rather, climate-induced mobility needs to be considered as a more protracted transition period characterized by loss, migration, adaptation and livelihood reconstruction.

There has also been a lot of regional variation as reported in recent literature. Provinces and communities are not equally vulnerable to climate hazards; and their vulnerability is influenced by factors such as their exposure, livelihood features, infrastructure, poverty, governance capacity, and access to social protection. Rehman's synthesis for 2026 shows variations between provinces regarding climate mobility, gendered vulnerability, disruption of livelihoods, and recovery opportunities. Likewise, IOM's recent climate vulnerability assessment of Umerkot, Sindh, shows how recurrent flooding and droughts affect livelihood insecurity and mobility decisions at the community level (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2025). These studies point to the need to consider the phenomenon of climate induced displacement as a socially differentiated phenomenon and not as a uniform process across the country.

Gendered Vulnerability to Climate-Induced Displacement

A large body of literature has shown that vulnerability to climate change is gendered. In rain-fed rural areas of Punjab, Habib et al. (2022) observed that men and women experienced different levels of vulnerability to climate change due to differences in their livelihood roles, responsibilities, resources and adaptive capacity. Women are often disadvantaged because they have limited access to productive resources, mobility and information, and have a socially assigned role. In the same way, Memon et al. (2023) reported that women and female-headed households were found to have higher social vulnerability in communities facing disasters in

Online ISSN: 3006-8886
Print ISSN: 3006-8878

Dadu, Sindh due to the socioeconomic and gender-related factors. The results show that climate hazards are not just a matter of social relations in which resources and opportunities are allocated.

The 2022 floods underscore these gender disparities. According to Kamran and Mir (2023), about 33 million people were impacted by the floods and highlighted the particular vulnerabilities of women and girls due to the impact of health services, reproductive health needs, the burden of care, and limited access to resources. They found that their analysis shows that disasters can exacerbate gender inequities and not affect men and women equally.

One of the most evident aspects of women's vulnerability is health. The difficulties in access to sexual and reproductive health services in flood-affected areas were also reported by Ashrat et al. (2024) and the challenges faced by women and girls with regard to maintaining menstrual health were reported by Tufail et al. (2023), due to inadequate sanitation facilities, interrupted supply chains, lack of privacy, and cultural stigma. In a similar vein, Zaigham et al. (2023) contend that disasters have the potential to significantly affect maternal healthcare and pose hazards for pregnant women. The studies suggest that displacement is not only a geographical phenomenon, but can also affect critical women-specific services, and have long-term implications for women's health and reproductive health.

Gendered vulnerability is not limited to safety and protection. Ullah et al. (2024a) show that the social injustice of climate induced migration for women in Pakistan stems from economic insecurity, socio-cultural restrictions, health vulnerabilities and under-representation in migration decision making processes. Their results show that in many cases male household members make decisions regarding migration. Ullah et al. (2024b) also show how displacement, living with overcrowding, poverty, a lack of adequate social protection, and lawlessness can make women more vulnerable to GBV. As a result, climate-induced displacement could exacerbate the existing inequalities and produce new forms of insecurity in camps, temporary settlement and destination communities.

Women's Agency and Adaptive Capacity

The literature on vulnerabilities is vast, and more and more academic research challenges the passive portrayal of women as victims. Women's knowledge, decision-making powers, social networks and contributions to adaptation to and disaster management are central to feminist perspectives on climate change. Women are recognized as agents of climate action and climate decision makers in Pakistan's Climate Change Gender Action Plan, which also calls for women's participation in climate decision making (International Union for Conservation of Nature [IUCN], 2022). Similarly, in Pakistan, the National Climate Change Policy (MoCC, 2021) highlights the vulnerability and the crucial role of women in adaptation and decision making.

It is supported by empirical studies. Ullah et al. (2024b) reported various disaster-management capacities possessed by the women such as Knowledge of local conditions, social networks, care taking practices, livelihood diversification and participation in disaster-relief activities. Likewise, in recent research by Anees and Mohsin (2025), adaptive social innovations, networks, and agency of women are identified as critical factors of household and community resilience. This evidence indicates that there is no necessary opposition between vulnerability and agency.

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Women might be structurally disadvantaged and yet be developing coping strategies in response to displacement, and contribute to collective recovery.

Women's knowledge and participation are very significant in disaster preparedness. Gender, social capital, livelihood and vulnerability are highlighted as themes in the state of the art review on flood research in Pakistan by Waseem and Rana (2023). They also indicate poor inclusion of women in early-warning systems and disaster-risk-reduction processes. This paradox is created, as women have valuable local knowledge and adaptive capacity but are underrepresented in formal disaster governance. Thus, enhancing women's agency is not a matter of awareness of coping mechanisms, but needs institutional processes that allow women to inform disaster planning and climate policy-making.

Women's Resilience and Recovery

Resilience is another crucial lens through which to view women's experiences of climate induced displacement. Resilience means to cope with shock, adjust to change, sustain livelihoods, deploy social resources and recover from disasters. The current research in Pakistan is increasingly pointing to the role of women's resilience being rooted in individual capabilities and inter-group relationships. For instance, studies have shown that the psychological resilience, sense of hope, religious convictions, and individual coping strategies of women played a role in their recovery from the floods in 2022 in Punjab, but at the same time, women's recovery was hindered by the lack of formal support mechanisms (2025).

It is also important to have economic resilience. Women's access to economic opportunities will be further restricted as the fruits of their labour, such as their assets and livestock, and their informal livelihoods will be lost due to climate-related disasters. As per the study conducted by Nosheen et al. (2023), climate change in Pakistan has an impact on health and livelihoods that is differentiated by gender, such as women's roles in livestock and other livelihoods that rely on natural resources. More recent literature also suggests that climate migration can exacerbate women's vulnerabilities to access to secure jobs and economic assets, especially when women are predominantly engaged in the informal sector (Rehman 2026). Therefore, access to land, jobs, financial resources, social protection and livelihood opportunities are all key factors to consider in the context of women's resilience.

Resilience is also related to education and social development. Chidambaram and Khalid (2024) shows that climate-related crises can negatively affect the education of girls and that general solutions may not be effective at mitigating the intersectional disadvantages faced by girls and women. They call for more specific policies that take into account the interaction of gender, poverty, displacement and educational disadvantage. This is especially critical as the disruption of girls' schooling has the potential to have long-term impacts on empowerment, employment and adaptive capacity.

Institutional and Policy Responses

Several policy tools have been crafted in Pakistan which acknowledge the link between climate change and gender. The National Climate Change Policy has put greater focus on gender mainstreaming and the participation of women in the response to climate change and the Climate

Online ISSN: 3006-8886
Print ISSN: 3006-8878

Change Gender Action Plan has introduced a more explicit plan for integrating gender into climate planning and implementation (IUCN, 2022; MoCC, 2021). The inclusion and adaptation of vulnerable groups is also given due attention in Pakistan's National Adaptation Plan (Government of Pakistan, 2023). But the literature suggests that the commitment and implementation of policy are not matching.

The Asian Development Bank Climate and Disaster Resilience Enhancement Program 2024 focuses on institutional capacity building, disaster-risk reduction, climate resilience and risk financing in Pakistan which includes gender and social aspects (ADB, 2024). Anticipation of climate displacement and urban and community resilience are also highlighted by UNDP (2024). But when women's participation is seen as an extra activity in isolation, and not as part of the planning, budgeting, early-warning, displacement management and recovery process, policy responses can be gender-coded and fail to pay attention to women's needs.

Hence, literature does indicate an important implementation gap. Pakistan's policies have increasingly acknowledged women as vulnerable groups and agents of resilience, but women are found to be under-represented in formal decision making structures. The research conducted in Pakistan in recent years has highlighted the ongoing challenges of structural patriarchy, governance shortcomings, lack of gender-specific infrastructure, climate finance accessibility, and the marginalization of vulnerable communities. (Tariq & Shafi, 2025) The challenges indicate that gender sensitive language is not enough – there also needs to be institutionalization that moves beyond the status quo and makes space for women to be meaningfully involved in preparedness, evacuation, relocation, livelihood recovery and adaptation planning.

Research Gap

The knowledge base on climate vulnerability, impacts of disasters, women's health, GBV, livelihood security and climate adaptation in Pakistan is quite rich. But most of the literature is sector-specific or event-specific, limiting its scope to health, livelihoods, education, violence or disaster vulnerability, respectively. Furthermore, there is a lack of national understanding of women's experience as several recent studies are based on local fieldwork, especially in Sindh, Punjab or Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. There is also a tendency to focus on women's vulnerability without adequate linking of this vulnerability with agency and resilience. Recent research has begun to acknowledge women's coping resources and their engagement, but these aspects have been studied apart from the structural conditions that give rise to vulnerability.

There is another gap in the evolution of secondary evidence. Academic research, government policies, institutional reports, humanitarian assessments and displacement information, while there is some, have not been systematically analyzed, particularly with a regard to the interplay between women's vulnerability, agency and resilience in the context of climate induced displacement. This is particularly significant as the complexity of climate mobility in Pakistan is increasing, ranging from temporary evacuation, repeated displacement, rural-urban mobility, livelihood mobility, to long-term displacement. This study has sought to fill this gap by drawing on secondary data and using qualitative thematic analysis of academic literature, policy documents, institutional and/or documentary reports, and other relevant sources. It therefore aims to offer an integrated gender-sensitive analysis of climate induced displacement in Pakistan

Online ISSN: 3006-8886
Print ISSN: 3006-8878

while acknowledging that women are not simply a vulnerable group, but also an active group of actors who are adapting, coping and resilient to climate change.

Findings and Discussion

Secondary data analysis shows that the process of displacement is not gender neutral in the context of climate change in Pakistan. Climate hazards, existing socio-economic inequalities, social norms and practices, limited resources and decision-making power intersect with women's experiences of displacement. The evidence too shows that the displaced women are not just victims. They demonstrate agency in adaptation to the house, livelihood strategies, networks, care taking and community recovery. The results are consequently presented through three themes that are interconnected: vulnerability, agency, and resilience of women, and finally, institutional responses are examined.

Women's Gendered Vulnerability

The first major finding is that the effect of displacement due to climate change is disproportionate and further exacerbates gender inequalities and vulnerabilities. The magnitude of the problem was exacerbated by the 2022 floods, which impacted around 33 million people and resulted in millions of IDPs (IDMC, 2023; Government of Pakistan et al., 2022). The impact of displacement, however, was different for women and men. Women's access to health care, sanitation, safe shelter, livelihoods, and essential services was hampered due to the exacerbation of their preexisting socioeconomic challenges under disaster conditions.

Women's limited movement is shown to be a vulnerability in particular. Women's capacity to evacuate on their own or to take decisions regarding migration may be restricted by the social/cultural norms associated with women's mobility and the division of responsibility for home. The study by Ullah et al. (2024a) revealed that the social injustices in the context of climate-induced migration in Pakistan included economic insecurity, health vulnerabilities, socio-cultural constraints, and lack of representation in migration decision-making. Thus, the process of displacement is frequently an indirect one which is mediated in the first place by male household decision makers, rather than being a direct move by women.

Another vital aspect is health and reproductive well-being. The loss of health facilities and reproductive-health services due to flooding caused significant challenges for pregnant women and women of reproductive age (WRA) (Kamran & Mir, 2023; Zaigham et al., 2023). Likewise, women's menstrual hygiene and dignity were impacted by the lack of sanitation and privacy that occurred in displacement areas (Tufail et al., 2023). These findings highlight how displacement can exacerbate the everyday gender disparities into vulnerabilities affecting human suffering.

The analysis also highlights increased risks of GBV. Women may be more vulnerable to violence and exploitation due to living in crowded shelters, an economic precarious situation, inadequate institutional protection, and being separated from their social norms (Ullah et al., 2024b). Therefore, the idea of climate-induced displacement cannot be approached as a one-dimensional phenomenon of people moving in response to a climatic event, as it can impact on women's security, health, livelihoods, dignity and social autonomy.

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Women's Agency in Conditions of Displacement

The second key finding is that it refutes a mere-vulnerability based representation of displaced women. While structural inequalities limit women's options, evidence shows that women respond to and negotiate displacement. Women's agency is manifested in livelihood adaptation, household management, social networking, care giving, involvement in relief work and mobilization of local knowledge.

Ullah et al. (2024b) shows that women have important disaster-management skills and are active in their household and community's response during floods. Household resources are often harshed, and women care for children and elderly members of the household, maintain social networks, and engage in recovery activities. These practices are also significant modes of everyday agency, even in the absence of formal authority.

Livelihood adaptation is another very notable expression of agency. The damage to agriculture and to traditional livelihoods by climate-induced displacement may lead to diversification of livelihoods by households. Women can react by engaging in informal work, small businesses, livestock activities, work at home, or other social networks. Women's economic engagement and empowerment are emphasized by Nosheen et al. (2023) as key aspects of climate adaptation in Pakistan. The strategies reflect women's agency in negotiating, rather than simply being the consequences of climate change.

But the analysis also reveals that the agency exists and is limited in its possibilities. Women's action is constrained by their access to financial resources, education, mobility, social networks, household decision-making and institutional support. Agency thus does not mean total freedom of choice. Rather, it grows out of specific social and structural contexts. A woman can be very resilient in her household and yet lack power to make decisions about relocation, property, work, and/or compensation.

Women's Resilience and Coping Strategies

The third key thing that was found is women's resilience. The findings indicate that the displaced women utilize several coping mechanisms to safeguard the household members and re-establish their livelihoods. These involve dependence on family/community networks, livelihood diversification, management of household resources, informal employment, involvement in community activities and psychological and social coping mechanisms.

Social networks are particularly important. Formal institutional support is often lacking, and family members, neighbors, groups within the community, and community organizations may be able to offer food, shelter, information, child care, and financial support. These networks can be used as a de facto social-protection system and help women to manage their displacement.

There is also literature that confirms the role of psychological and cultural resources. The psychological responses to the 2022 floods were addressed by immediate coping strategies, social interactions, hope and religious/cultural factors among women affected by the floods (2025). The results indicate that the concept of resilience is not only one of material capacity but also emotional, social and cultural.

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But the study concludes that resilience cannot be mythologized. A continuous exposure to poor institutional support can result in an erosion of disaster relief responsibility from the institutions and governments towards vulnerable communities. True resilience demands structural measures, such as housing, health, education, labor, social protection, climate finance and DRR.

Institutional and Policy Gaps

The last theme relates to the disconnect between gender-sensitive policy promises and actions. The National Climate Change Policy, National Adaptation Plan and Climate Change Gender Action Plan have been developed to address the vulnerabilities of women and to highlight the importance of gender inclusion (Government of Pakistan, 2023; IUCN, 2022; MoCC, 2021). But the secondary evidence indicates that implementation is inconsistent.

Women are still under-represented in formal decision-making for disasters and climate change. Therefore, without gender-sensitivity, policies may not be effective in addressing women's mobility, reproductive health, sanitation, protection from violence, livelihood recovery, or whether they will participate in relocation decision-making. UNDP (2024) also stresses the importance of anticipatory modalities of climate migration rather than responding to disasters as a primary means of addressing climate relocation.

The conclusions therefore call for a shift in policy focus from “protect vulnerable women” to “empower women as decision makers and agents of resilience.” Women's involvement should be included in early-warning systems, in evacuation planning, in the management of shelters, in livelihood programmes, in adaptation to climate change, in relocation decisions, and in post-disaster recovery.

Overall Discussion

Overall, the results indicate a complexity of vulnerability, agency and resilience. Structural gender inequalities in climate induced displacement make women highly vulnerable to many impacts but they also possess considerable resilience to deal with climate induced displacement, adapt, negotiate and take part in recovery. Vulnerability and agency are not opposites, but rather coexist.

The results confirm a gender-sensitive approach to climate displacement, which considers environmental risks along with social structures and power dynamics. Gender inequalities are not the sole responsibility of climate-induced displacement, but rather are more likely to be exacerbated by the presence of climate-induced displacement. Meanwhile, displacement can also expose and consolidate women's ability to adapt, and take collective action. It is, therefore, suggested that policies on climate displacement in Pakistan must acknowledge that women are rights bearers, vulnerable and resilient agents. An effective gender-responsive approach should tackle structural inequalities and provide institutional opportunities for women's meaningful involvement in adaptation, disaster management, and planning for displacement and long-term recovery.

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Print ISSN: 3006-8878

Conclusion

The process of climate induced displacement in Pakistan is gendered and pre-existing social, economic and patriarchal disparities in the country are compounded by environmental hazards, which impact on women's vulnerability, agency and resilience in different ways. The results show that women are disproportionately affected due to a lack of mobility, livelihood insecurity, access to health care and reproductive health services, lack of sanitation, displacement insecurity and limited participation in household and institutional decision making. But, when displaced women are the sole actors as victims, it is an incomplete picture of their experiences. Women actively utilize their agency in livelihood adaptation, household management, social networks, care-giving, community engagement, and locally crafted coping mechanisms. Their resilience is thus individual and collective but it is limited by poor institutional backing and structural inequalities. The study also identifies that there is a disconnect between the creation of gender-responsive climate policies in Pakistan and their operationalization, especially in the context of meaningful engagement and participation of women in disaster preparedness, displacement planning, recovery and adaptation. The overall study findings suggest the need for a framework that acknowledges women's rights, agency, and resilience in addition to a vulnerability-based approach to addressing climate-induced displacement. Gender responsive climate and displacement policies should increase women's resource access, social protection, health care access, livelihoods, safety and decision-making opportunities. This can help aid a more equitable and inclusive process of climate adaptation and build the resilience of displaced women and their communities to cope with and adapt to the growing complexities of climate change in Pakistan.

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