

Intersections of Vulnerability, Resilience, and Mental Health Impacts of Climate Change on Women Living in River Islands in Assam, India

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01. Introduction

- Globally:
- The climate crisis is reshaping the understanding of vulnerability and resilience around the world (1).
 - Rising temperatures and erratic monsoons result in frequent and devastating floods, disrupting lives, eroding livelihoods, and perpetuating uncertainty (2).
- Assam, India:
- In the river islands, women, as primary caregivers, shoulder the responsibility of caring for family members during and after climate-induced disasters, amplifying their stress and anxiety (3).
 - There is an intersection of **climate change, gender dynamics, and mental health** revealing interconnected challenges.
 - The historical backdrop of political conflict, discrimination, and statelessness in Assam adds another layer of stress and trauma (4), further affecting the mental health of these women.



The central research question revolved around how these women in climate-affected river islands navigate the adverse impacts of climate change by shedding light on their vulnerability, resilience and mental health in the face of complex challenges.

02. Methodology

This study used a comprehensive qualitative research approach, involving a wide range of stakeholders. The study is inspired by the framework of intersectionality, vulnerability, and resilience proposed by Chisty et al. (2021) (5). Methods used:

- Collaborative workshop
- DesignShop
- Focus groups
- In-depth interviews



03. Findings



- The **intersection of climate and gender dynamics** lies a hidden burden that women shoulder during climate-induced disasters.
 - Active participation in domestic and economic responsibilities often goes unnoticed
 - Child marriage
 - Vulnerability of pregnant women
- **Climate-related disasters** cause unpredictable weather patterns and increased flooding and erosion
 - Disrupting the local economy
 - Reduced agricultural productivity and fish populations
 - Loss of livelihoods exacerbate stress and anxiety, contributing to mental health issues
- **Mental health challenges**
 - Somatization of mental health symptoms into physical issues due to cultural stigmatization and a lack of awareness
 - Absence of appropriate mental health services
- **Resilience** of the Char Chapori (river island) communities
 - Coping mechanisms rooted in strong social support networks, community cohesion, and traditional knowledge, enabling individuals to navigate challenges, build resilience, and maintain their mental well-being.

04. Conclusion

The findings have important implications for policymakers, mental health practitioners, and community leaders in the region to recognize the disproportionate impact of climate change on women's mental health and develop policies and interventions that provide equal access to coping mechanisms, broaden the understanding of mental health beyond the Western definition and develop skills that incorporate an understanding of intersectional vulnerability and resilience.

Recommendations

- Community-based strategies, knowledge-sharing, and disaster preparedness plans that include traditional knowledge of those living in the river islands
- Climate-resilient interventions and adaptation that reduces loss of livelihood's
- Investment in mental health programs from health spending
- Prioritization of intersection of gender and climate in policy development



05. References

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