

# Gender and Disaster



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What is Gender?

# Gender

- *Sex* describes the biological differences between men and women, which are universal and determined at birth.
- *Gender* refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures. The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity).

# Difference between Sex and Gender

Male or Female	Masculine or Feminine
Biologically defined	Socially Constructed
Refers to Biological condition of men and women	Refers to the position of men and women in society

# What is gender.....?

- **Gender** refers to social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes.
- **Gender** determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context.
- **Gender** is part of the broader socio-cultural context. Other important criteria for socio-cultural analysis includes class, race, poverty level, ethnic group and age.

# Gender Equality and Equity

***Gender Equality*** means that women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefiting from, economic, social, cultural and political development.

***Gender Equity*** is the process of being fair to men and women. To ensure fairness, measures must often be put in place to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on a level playing field. Equity is a means. Equality and equitable outcomes are the results.

# Gender and disaster myths

- Disasters hit “people” not men and women
- Women are not especially vulnerable in disasters and/or...
- Women are always highly vulnerable in disasters

# Gender and disaster realities

- Disasters happen to women and men
- They unfold in highly gendered conditions
- Yes, women are often at increased risk
- But both women and men have critical strengths and resources in disasters
- Disaster management, too, is gendered



# **Women and Disaster: Understanding Vulnerabilities**

- Research conducted around the world from a gender perspective does suggest that women are likely to be especially vulnerable to disasters simply because gender inequality is so widespread.

# **Sex and gender can increase social vulnerability**

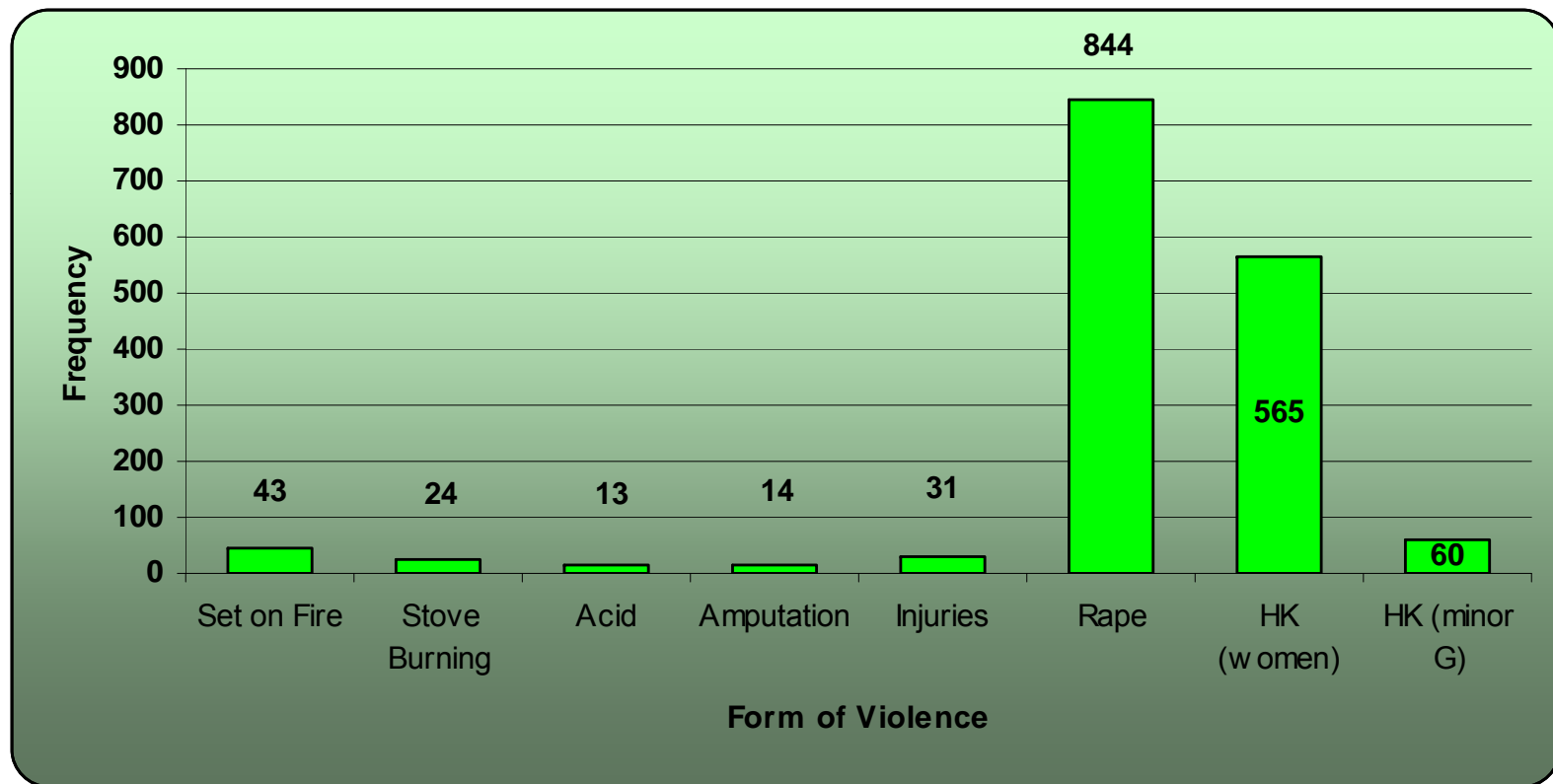
- Bodies
- Identities
- Social relationships
- Inequalities
- Gender as a cross-cutting factor

# Why are Women more Vulnerable?

- **Less access to resources – social networks and decision-making**
- **Informal and agricultural sectors are usually the most impacted by disasters, thus women become over-represented among the unemployed.**
- **Primarily responsible for domestic duties and thus do not have the liberty of migrating to look for work.**
- **Low visibility in society and attention to their needs is woefully inadequate.**
- **Have less freedom and mobility to look for alternative sources of income.**
- **Majority of shelter residents remain women and thus leads to increase in levels of domestic and sexual violence**
- **Reproductive and sexual health care are mostly avoided**



# VAW situation in Pakistan from Jan-Dec 2006



*Source: State of Human Rights in 2006, HRCP Report*

# What are the stories from the fields (Vulnerable within the vulnerable)

“It was observed amply in the Asian Tsunami and in the Kashmir earthquake that more women were killed, subjected to rape and sexual violence and threats to their physical security, women were made to suffer humiliation, and harassment by the insensitive relief and recovery teams and were denied direct access to relief packages, health care and other opportunities”

(cites the south Asian Disaster Report 2005 of Rural Development Policy Institute)

## Why is Disaster Management Important for Women .....

Women are more at risk of dying than men

- During the Bangladesh cyclone of 1991, mortality levels amongst females over the age of ten were three times higher than those of males (Twigg 2004).
- In the Latur, Maharashtra (India) earthquake of 1993, women accounted for 48% of the affected population, but accounted for 55% of those who died (Twigg 2004).
- In the Asian tsunamis, five times as many women as men are believed to have died (Chew and Ramdass 2005).
- Disproportionate numbers of women were killed in the earthquake that devastated large areas of Kashmir and NWFP (Pakistan in 2005) (Chew and Ramdas 2005)



# Seeing Disaster Risk Through Women's Eyes

- Women have unique perspectives on community danger and safety. There is no uniform or universal "women's view" on risk and disaster. Being a woman means different things in different cultures, and these cultural differences matter in a crisis.
- Until all studies of hazard and disaster are gender-sensitive, we won't have the knowledge we need about the world as it is. And until we look at disasters through women's eyes, we won't know enough about half the world's population in disaster situations.

# Four Questions

- Why is gender sensitive knowledge needed?
- Why is gender sensitive knowledge exchange needed?
- What difference does gender make in the field?
- Why is gender equality needed for disaster risk reduction?



# Why Gender Sensitivity

- ▶ Gender-sensitive knowledge is needed because gender is a central organizing principle in human life
- ▶ Gender-sensitive knowledge exchange is needed because all perspectives are needed and all people have knowledge
- ▶ Gender-sensitive disaster practice is needed to achieve sustainable risk reduction and disaster management
- ▶ Gender-sensitive disaster policy is needed to protect all people from avoidable harm and promote all people's human rights

## How Can Women Prepare for Disasters?

- Women are most effective at mobilizing the community to respond to disasters.
- During October 2005 women participated in search and rescue and relief work
- Women members of Search and Rescue team of FOCUS Pakistan are equipped and specialized in S & R
- FOCUS trained over 34,000 volunteers in different part of the country and their response to local disasters are very effective



## **Case study:**

### **Breaking the Norms – Female member of Search and Rescue Team**



# **ISSUES FACING WOMEN AFTER DISASTERS**

- **HOUSING**
- **TRANSPORTATION**
- **INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT**
- **DEPENDENT CARE**
- **PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH**
- **VIOLENCE**
- **ACCESS TO RELIEF RESOURCES**
- **FULL PARTICIPATION IN DISASTER DECISION-MAKING**

# Challenges for Women in Disasters (Immediate)

- Loss of family members
- Issues of protection (adoption, trafficking)
- Loss of home – living in camps
- Cultural values may even hinder women's rescue as males may not be allowed to touch women and rescue them.
- Access to relief
- Access to health (men may not allow women to see male doctors)
- Access to information
- Cultural and religious obligations (e.g. limitations of a Muslim widow who is not allowed to see *namahram*) which can create hindered in terms to access to both information, relief.



# Challenges for Women in Disasters

## (Medium to Long Term)

- Changing role of women – from care giver to head of household
- Lack of safety nets
- Coping with loss
- Coping with disabilities
- Limited understanding of women's needs in post disaster situation (i.e reproductive health)



# Challenges for Women in Disasters

## (Medium to Long Term)

- In case of IDPs, protection issues such as the location of washrooms, lightening etc.
- Physical and sexual harassment
- Access to compensation
- Having the right documentation (ID cards, property deeds)
- Illiteracy can be big hurdle in women's access to resources
- Denial of girl child's right – nutrition, education, health etc.

# Challenges

- ▶ Lack of resources: whose responsibility?
- ▶ Knowledge to action roadblocks (the same old story)
- ▶ Disciplinary discipline: whose work is it? who says?
- ▶ Passive resistance: who cares?
  - Gender politics
  - Disaster paradigm
  - Institutional power
  - Denial, minimizing



# Conclusion

- Are women victimized by disasters, or are they heroines who save the day?

Neither of course

- But only when women's skills, knowledge, abilities, and networks are recognized—as well as the factors which make their daily lives so risky—can women and men work together as full and equal partners to make communities safer.

*« Full and active participation of men and women to reduce disaster risk is essential for achieving disaster resilient households, communities and nations »*

*UN/ISDR*