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## Women on the frontlines of climate change: Exploring the intersection of climate change and mental wellbeing in the vulnerable coastal areas of Bangladesh

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**Statement of Problem:** Climate change and its associated environmental crises have been identified as one of the most pressing global health challenges of the 21st century. Bangladesh is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world, with 18% of its population living in coastal areas at risk of flooding and sea-level rise (Haque, et al., 2019). Bangladesh is ranked as the 5th most at-risk disaster-prone country in the world. The impact of climate change on human health is expected to be wide-ranging, including physical health, mental health, and social wellbeing (World Health Organisation, 2018). Mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), are among the most reported health outcomes associated with climate change (Cunsolo Willox, et al., 2016). According to the World Health Organisation and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, women are more vulnerable due to biological, political and cultural factors (Chauhan & Kumar, 2016) (WHO, 2014). Women and girls are highly vulnerable to climate change owing to their restricted access to resources and little to no involvement in the decision-making process. The psychological impact of climate crises is an under-explored area, and the importance of women's mental health, who are already marginalised and deprived, is often overlooked. However, few studies have explored the mental health status of women in these areas, who are often disproportionately affected by climate crises (UN Women, 2018).

**Methodology:** The study uses explanatory sequential mixed methods and a cross-sectional study design. Various villages from the Decope area of district Khulna were selected for the study. Quantitative data was collected through a questionnaire survey, while qualitative data collection was done through Focus Group Discussions. The study used a sample size of 420 for the survey and 8-10 participants in each FGD group. Data analysis was carried out through SPSS and

NVivo programming software.

**Preliminary Results:** The preliminary quantitative results show that 88.3% of women reported concern about wellbeing due to climate crises. 57.7% of women reported suffering from symptoms such as feeling anxious/nervous, trouble sleeping, feeling sad/depressed etc. 81.2% of women reiterated that women face more difficulties due to climate crises. 66.6% of women reported having physical symptoms because of mental health issues following a natural disaster. Preliminary qualitative analysis shows women almost unanimously agreeing to higher vulnerability to mental health issues among women, due to frequent disasters and their role as caregivers of the family.

**Conclusion:** Preliminary data suggests that women have been at the forefront of climate change and have increased vulnerability to mental health issues due to their role in society and limited access to resources and information. This study aims to be the basis of further research and highlight the impact of climate crises among these marginalized communities who receive limited to no support.

**Keywords:** The keywords used were "climate change", "mental health", "women", "deprived communities", "vulnerable populations", and "natural disasters"

### Biography

Haniya Syed is a Lecturer of Public Health and Leadership at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge UK. She is an academic covering subjects such as epidemiology, biostatistics, healthcare management etc. Her research is focused mainly on climate change, women's health, and reproductive and mental health. She is a dentist by background and has continued her career in Public Health at Anglia Ruskin University. She is a published author, and a peer reviewer for journals such as BMJ Public Health, Hindawi, PeerJ and Cureus. Haniya is also a member of the editorial board Asian Journal of Psychiatry and Mental Health.