

Gendered Dimensions of Crisis Communication: Women's Lived Experiences during the 2025 Floods in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: The study explores the way women in Pakistan experienced crisis communication in the floods of 2025. It examines the issues they encounter, the encouragement they get, and the communication gaps in the case of emergencies. This paper seeks to learn the way in which gender affects the access to information and protection during the disaster. It also shows how improved communication will provide greater protection to women in emergencies to come.

Methodology: The current study was performed by a qualitative design. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with 15 women who have been affected by floods in Pakistan (Punjab, KP). Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. All the interviews were videotaped and transcribed. Thematic analysis was used to determine themes that were common and ethical guidelines were followed. Each participant gave their consent and their information was stored.

Findings: Women faced a lot of communication problems at the time of floods of 2025. A lot of them were late in getting warnings due to being in the control of men, and the public alerts were primarily targeted towards men. The culture did not allow women to attend meetings as they were confined at homes or checking formal updates.

Conclusion: The study concluded that during the 2025 flood in Pakistan, women faced many issues, including limited cellphone access, digital gadgets, and dependency on male family members for access to online information. Findings from earlier research work from Pakistan highlight that the technological warning system is out of reach for women in the country, especially when they do not have control over digital devices (Shah et al., 2022). International research also validates that uneven digital access increases the vulnerability of women during times of disaster (UN Women, 2025).

Keywords: Gender and Crisis Communication, Pakistan Flood 2025, Women's Lived Experience, Climate Change.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is hit by floods frequently. The 2025 floods were among the worst floods experienced in the country in recent years. Rivers as well as communities were overwhelmed by heavy monsoon rains, glacial melts, and discharges of water upstream. Hundreds of lives were lost, millions were impacted, homes were destroyed, and such enormous displacements were counted by the media (Ahmed & Kashif, 2025; Akram et al., 2023; OCHA, 2025; UNICEF, 2025b). These floods demonstrated that communication systems are weak when put under strain.

During the disaster, communication plays a crucial role. Messages of caution, appeal, and relief should reach every individual. Nevertheless, information cannot be equally accessible and trusted by everyone. One of the greatest axes of inequality in access to communication is gender. In most societies, women are socially, economically, and mobile constrained, unlike men. The constraints affect the way in which they receive, comprehend, and respond to crisis messages (Pearson et al., 2017; Raza & Shah, 2024).

Climate change is not a problem that is consistent across all groups. Vulnerability, adaptation, and recovery are of great concern, depending on gender (Denton, 2002). Extreme weather events usually have a greater burden on women. They are less controlling of assets, less mobile, less literate on average, and have more caregiving roles (Rahman, 2013).

The climate crisis is not “gender neutral.” Women and girls bear the brunt of its impacts, which amplify existing gender inequalities and pose unique threats to their livelihoods, health, and safety (UN Women, 2025).

Climate change puts more pressure on marginalized groups. Women are among them and suffer more. They are less likely to own resources, control assets or land, less likely to be literate, and have limited mobility. These drawbacks constrain their capacity to adapt, recover, or even receive early warnings. Recent systematic review indicates that, in low- and middle-income nations, women experience increased burdens of health issues, lack of water security, and social stress of climate shocks (Anjum & Aziz, 2025). Climate change increases pre-existing inequalities: already marginalized individuals in society suffer greater losses in terms of income, health, and security when the disaster occurs (Zahnow et al., 2025).

The vulnerability of women to climate change is related to their roles and social standing across the globe. Women in most societies do the household responsibilities like water, fuel, and food. They bear the responsibility of living with minimal assistance when the effects of droughts, floods, or storms upset those resources. In dry and semi-arid areas, it has been observed that women suffer more than men when there is climate stress because they are used to working with limited resources and rely on natural systems (Zahnow et al., 2025). Moreover, adaptation programs tend to benefit the male farmers, giving women less access to extension services, access to credit, or training.

Climate change has a gender effect in South Asia. A literature survey of climate change and women in South Asia reveals that women are disproportionately affected in agriculture, food security, health, and water and sanitation (Patel et al., 2020). Women mostly rely on small-scale agriculture or animals, which are very sensitive to weather (Climate change). Whenever there is flooding or drought, their survival is adversely affected. The review states that climate policies should be gender sensitive so as not to continue poverty and inequality in the area.

A recent study on adaptation in South Asia points out that gender relations have not been addressed in climate policy. It stresses that women are prevented in their adaptation efforts by social norms, limited access to resources, and less power to make decisions (Prakash, 2024). There is a restriction in the mobility of women in most cases in South Asian countries during times of disaster; they are incapable of evacuation and take part in early warnings on the same level as men. This unequal treatment of women in the case of emergencies ends up hurting them (women) more.

Empirical studies from Pakistan highlight that females are vulnerable to the shocks of disasters. According to a recent report, displacement due to climate change increases the risk of gendered violence, social exclusion, economic insecurity, and uncertainty for women (CRSS, 2024). In rural Pakistan, women are deprived of ownership of land and individual income, and they do not have power when making decisions at home. These shortcomings aggravate their ability to adjust or recover following a disaster.

Gender influences how climate risks are perceived. Men and women can have different priorities regarding the perceived threat or the degree to which they trust a formal or informal warning mechanism. Women can depend on social networks, neighbors, or local authorities more, as they cannot have access to digital means or open forums (Shah et al., 2022).

1.1 Research Gap

Women cannot access disaster warnings and relief services equally, as it is revealed in global studies. They possess fewer control means of communication and reduced access to the digital world (Amber & Chichaibelu, 2023). The social and cultural norms also tend to restrict the female gender from taking early warnings or even attending community meetings (Enarson & Chakrabarti, 2009).

Disaster studies in South Asia verify that women experience more harm and are slower in recovery after floods. However, research in Pakistan does not explain how women interpret or trust official information. Limited literature can be found on local communication obstacles or gender-sensitive risk communication (Rao et al., 2025). Disaster studies in Pakistan pay more attention to the physical damage, loss, and emergency response. There are not many studies on ways in which people get or interpret crisis information. Studies that incorporate gender tend to emphasize the vulnerability of women, but do not focus on the role of communication in making them feel safe (Akter, 2021).

No significant published research on the lived experiences of women on crisis communication in the 2025 Pakistan floods exists. The current devastating floods were considered one of the worst in the country. They influenced millions of women, but they are not heard in research and policy (UNICEF, 2025a). This creates a gap in research on gender and crisis communication in the context of the disaster in Pakistan.

1.2 Problem Statement

Pakistan was characterized by massive destruction and millions of people displaced in 2025 floods. Some people were not able to have the right information concerning the magnitude of the flood and evacuation processes (OCHA, 2025). Communication reported collapses at local and national levels. The women had greater struggles. Lack of mobility, cultural norms and non-access to media made it difficult for them to obtain proper information (Ullah et al., 2024). Therefore, most of the women relied on the male kinsmen or neighbors to inform them, acting slowly in response. Literacy and low phone ownership worsened this problem (Amber & Chichaibelu, 2023).

Pakistan has not yet been gender-blind in communication of disasters. Messages are frequently developed without taking into account the needs of women or the barriers that they experience when accepting warnings. Disaster agencies do not understand what it is like to be a woman experience of a disaster, thus, cannot be included in crisis communication strategies. The study of how women went through crisis communication during the 2025 floods is urgently needed. This study assists in determining the location, and reasons of information gaps occurrence. It also helps to develop more effective communication channels that would reach all people irrespective of gender and social status.

1.3 Research Objectives

To explore how women in Pakistan received and understood crisis communication during the 2025 floods.

To identify social, cultural, and structural barriers that limit women's access to timely and reliable flood-related information.

To suggest gender-sensitive communication strategies that can improve information delivery during future disasters.

1.4 Research Questions

RQ1: How did women receive and interpret flood warnings and crisis messages during the 2025 floods in Pakistan?

RQ2: What social and cultural factors prevented women from accessing or trusting official communication during the floods?

RQ3: What communication approaches can ensure better inclusion of women in disaster warning and response systems in Pakistan?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender is one of the most important factors in information reception and response. There is commonly a disparity in access to communication devices and community networks by women and men. Research indicates that women are more disadvantaged in accessing information, including low literacy, limited movement, and unequal access to media (Enarson & Morrow, 1988; Gharshin, 2025; UN Women, 2023). The social norms may also prevent women from participating in disasters in terms of attending a meeting or making decisions.

Empirical studies conducted by most countries have revealed that women are more exposed to the risk of disasters. They also take a long time to recover due to the home and family care management, with less control over resources (Akter, 2021). This gender disparity is more prominent in times of floods, drought, and cyclones. Gender disparity in education and earnings contributes to the impact of climate catastrophes in South Asia (Rao et al., 2025; Raza, Iftikhar, & Shah, 2025).

Floods are common and frequent natural disasters in Pakistan. They destroy homes, crops, and lives. Women tend to be more vulnerable since they either get warnings late or rely on members of their family (male) as sources of information (Akram et al., 2024; Ullah et al., 2024). Limited literature exists that examines the perception and attitude of women toward flood-related communication. Most of the research is limited to damage evaluation or relief efforts.

Studies of calamities reveal that gender has a devastating influence on the experience, response, and recovery of people in the aftermath of calamities. Women are usually at a greater risk since they lack resources, education, and decision-making power. Prior studies in various regions of the globe indicate that women lose their lives in relatively greater numbers during the occurrence of floods, storms, and heat waves because they cannot move freely and perform societal functions (Neumayer & Plümper, 2007; Pinho-Gomes et al., 2024). They also assume greater unpaid care and emotional support following a disaster, slowing down the recovery and reducing their involvement in decisions taken publicly (Bradshaw, 2013).

Feminist disaster research stresses that women are not only victims of climatic catastrophes, but they also play an important role as agents of change to organize communities, manage relief, and reconstruct the social bonding (Dev, 2025; Enarson & Morrow, 1988).

Gender inequality is noticeable during climatic issues, particularly in South Asia. Cultural norms and family barriers limit the women's reach and movement to warning messages in times of flood and other disasters. A study in Bangladesh revealed that during cyclones, many women died as societal practices did not encourage them to leave their homes without the consent of their family men (Ikeda, 1995). Similar trends are observable in India and Pakistan, where women have partial access to disaster info due to their low education and the fact that they rely on their male family members at the time of floods.

These results highlight the fact that gendered disaster vulnerability is not only social and structural, but physical at the same time (Ahmad et al., 2025).

Crisis communication enables individuals to realize the dangers and act in case of a disaster. Gender shapes how this communication works in real life. Messages are not always interpreted and perceived in the same manner by women and men. Research indicates that females are less exposed to official information since they possess fewer mobile phones, use fewer digital tools, and rely on local networks (Amber & Chichaibelu, 2023). Women are also inhibited by social roles from participating in public meetings or decision-making areas, which undermines their chances of getting early warnings (Enarson & Chakrabarti, 2009). These limits mean that crisis messages may reach women late or not at all.

It is also found that in most cases, women have used informal networks to exchange information in times of climate disasters. When the official systems fail, local groups, neighbors, and community leaders become reliable sources (Paton, 2015). Gender-sensitive communication identifies such patterns in the community and uses a variety of channels to reach all. In Nepal, research shows that rural women had better awareness of disasters with community radio and women's cooperatives (small groups or organizations formed and managed by women) (Saha et al., 2021). Female volunteers with risk communication training were used more efficiently to disseminate timely flood alerts in Bangladesh (Saha et al., 2021). These researchers demonstrate that when women are incorporated in communication planning, the response to a crisis becomes more efficient and all-inclusive.

Climate change enhances the number and intensity of floods, heat waves, and storms. Such incidents also require prompt and unambiguous interaction between the government and society. Communication associated with a crisis in a changing climate must be able to present scientific information in a manner that can be comprehended and believed by the people. It has been found that the use of timely messages helps to alleviate fear and encourages timely action (Stamm et al., 2000). Local culture and language are also appropriate and supportive in crisis communication (Hernández et al., 2018).

Digital media, radio, and community networks are useful in disseminating alerts in case of climatic crises. Researchers observe that the reaction to climate warnings is determined by trust and experience (Liu et al., 2024). Poor and rural groups are, however, left behind in unequal access to technology. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, lack of communication tends to increase the losses of a disaster, particularly in third-world nations (IPCC, 2023). Good communication about crises thus requires an understanding of climate, active involvement of locals, and the inclusion of all social classes.

Flood has a different impact on women and men. Women tend to have the primary responsibility of domestic assignments and childcare, which increases during and after floods. It has been found that women lose more belongings and have less access to relief aid because they control fewer resources (Neumayer & Plümper, 2007). Like the case in Bangladesh and India, it is a common social rule that prevents early evacuation and shelter to women, which results in increased mortality of women in floods (Ikeda, 1995).

Gendered patterns are the same in Pakistan. Women living in flood-prone regions complain of a lack of warning systems, sanitation services within the shelters, and being exposed to more health risks (Ullah et al., 2024). The studies of the 2022 and 2025 floods reveal that women had to turn more to informal networks to seek help and information (Akter, 2021; Fida et al., 2025). These results are an indication that gender inequality influences vulnerability, as well as communication and recovery. These lived experiences are the important things to understand to develop a reasonable and efficient disaster response.

Pakistan is a country of frequent flooding, earthquakes, and heat waves. Women do not always receive communication in such crises due to social expectations, illiteracy, and lack of access to digital media. The study indicates that most communication systems in Pakistan cater to the general audience rather than women's requirements (Amber & Chichaibelu, 2023).

Following the 2010 and 2022 Sindh and Punjab floods, rural Sindhi and Punjabi women said they had gotten evacuation notices late or not at all. Women are usually less involved during relief activities and the decision-making process due to the absence of gender-sensitive planning. research underlines that when women are integrated into disaster communication networks, the trust is higher and local response is usually guaranteed. However, despite these facts and findings, gender remains an absent concept in the official policies of disaster communication in Pakistan, which leaves many women unprepared and unassisted during emergencies (Ashraf et al., 2024; CLEAR Global, 2023; Liou et al., 2020).

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The current study is based on two theories. The first is Feminist Communication Theory, which explains how power and gender influence access to information and voice in public spaces. The second is Risk and Crisis Communication Theory; this theory focuses on how individuals receive, understand, interpret, and react to warning information during emergencies. These two theories collectively can explain how women in Pakistan experienced crisis communication during the 2025 floods and why gender-sensitive strategies are needed for inclusive disaster management.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research attempts to understand women's lived experience of crisis communication during the 2025 floods in Pakistan by utilizing the qualitative approach. According to (Creswell, 2013) qualitative research is used to understand the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of people in their native and natural environment. This approach is suitable for this study because the research is not based on numbers and statistics, but on subjective experiences.

The qualitative design was selected due to the possibility of developing the voices and perceptions of women in detail. The study aims to know how women received, interpreted, and responded to the information during the floods. It is not intended to quantify the number of women who encountered a particular problem, but to recount their communication experiences in a very engaging way. Qualitative methods have also been utilized in similar studies to explore the issue of disaster communication and gender roles in South Asia (Fatema et al., 2023; Memon, 2023).

3.1 Study Area

The current study was conducted in three flood-hit provinces of Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh. These provinces were among the most flood victim areas during 2025 (UNICEF, 2025b).

Each province consists of rural, urban, and semi-urban areas/ communities and different levels of access to communication tools. Choosing multifaceted and multiple regions helps to ensure a range of women's lived experiences of crisis communication during the flood of 2025.

3.2 Population, Sampling, and Sample

The population of the current study includes all Pakistani women above 18 years who experienced the flood of 2025. The sample consists of 15 participants selected through purposive sampling. This technique allows the researcher to choose participants who can best explain the issue (Etikan, 2016). Women are selected from various socioeconomic backgrounds to capture diversity in education, access to information, and community roles.

3.3 Data Analysis

Transcripts were reviewed using a thematic method. They were read several times to ensure familiarity with the content. The information was then coded systematically to pinpoint major patterns. These labels were grouped into wider themes that encompassed shared concepts and worries. Significant themes involved the necessity to incorporate climate change into instruction, the absence of organizational backing, and the hurdle of restricted funds. Major themes include structural gendered inequalities in

receiving early warnings, culturally based mobility restrictions, and reliance on community-based female networks.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was taken before the start interview. All participants were duly informed about the purpose of the research study. They are also informed that they can step down or withdraw at any stage of the interview. All demographic and obtained data remained confidential, and names/identities will remain anonymous (Orb et al., 2001).

4. RESULTS

Theme 1: Gendered Information Gaps and Delayed Early Warnings

Women from the flood-hit areas frequently claimed that they had received flood-related alerts late, indirectly, or sometimes not at all, therefore exposing the highly gendered character of information distribution in Pakistani families. Early warning messages sent by media broadcasts, local notices, or SMS seldom reached women directly; mostly because male relatives controlled mobile phones and digital gadgets. Most women said they only discovered the flood when men came home from work or when the water had already reached the community. Assuming men to be the main receivers and decision-makers, traditional early warning systems, mosque speakers, neighborhood meetings, and union council meetings were mostly focused on them. Women thus remained passive receivers rather than active participants in risk communication. Especially in rural areas, poor literacy limited women even more from freely reading written warnings. Information gap created due to gender difference not only slows down the women's evacuation process but also upsurges the uncertainty, vulnerability, and terror among them during floods in Pakistan. So, gender roles built into communication networks make it difficult for women to get life-saving info during the 2025 floods in Pakistan.

Theme 2: Mobility Restrictions and Cultural Norms Limiting Access to Official Communication

Mobility obstacles influenced by male-controlled culture have become major constraints to women's access to reliable and official flood warnings/information. Throughout Pakistan, many women were kept in homes during the tragic episode of flood 2025, so women were unable to visit community meetings, visit nearby local government offices, or see the river flood level directly. Women in Pakistan are often dependent on male family members when it comes to critical information, evacuation announcements, travel, food chain supply updates, or shelter sites. Women in the far-flung areas of Punjab, KP, and Sind, purdah traditions (Veiling, segregation, and seclusion practices for women) kept them from going out during calamities, even when the water levels were rising in river belts. Male family members usually hold most of the decision-making authority, so women get limited opportunities to verify warnings or decide on the evacuation planning. During climactic tragedies, when conflict news spreads throughout the community, not enough physical access to communication points intensified the feelings of bleakness and hopelessness. This theme emphasizes how deep-rooted cultural expectations marginalize women's capability to protect themselves in the middle of a flood crisis.

Theme 3: Reliance on Informal and Women-Led Networks for Crisis Information

During the flood in Pakistan, women depend on community-based, unofficial, women-led networks as their source of timely and correct information due to official communication gaps. Research participants were told that during floods, women living next door, relatives, and local women's organizations worked as an unofficial source of information, who kept them updated. Many homes found women learning about warnings when other women knocked on their doors or shouted across compounds, building a nexus of quick information exchange. Women's social media groups (especially WhatsApp), often exchanged via a family member's cellphone, spread predictions, advice, and early warnings even in the time of limited internet access. These unofficial means of communication assisted women in getting helpful and practical

information, which also helped offset institutional deficiencies. Women believe that they feel at ease to grab information and knowledge from other women. It shows that during the 2025 floods, women's cohesion and community connections transformed into communication networks, superseding the male-dominated formal style of communication.

Theme 4: Distrust in Institutional Warnings and Perceived Neglect by Authorities

There is a general mistrust of government institutions regarding early warning systems in climatic events, which massively affects how women interpret and respond to flood-related data. Many participants of the study talked about their previous experience of disastrous events when government institutions released early warnings and cautions too late, and were unable to provide immediate assistance. As a result of earlier poor experiences, they become careful and unsure about official alerts. Women noted that what government agencies are claiming, what they are watching on media, especially TV, and what the ground realities are, do not match with each other, so they stopped fully trusting governmental warnings. In some regions of flood-affected areas, unverified information and rumors secured close attention compared to the official version, therefore exposing a visible lack of trust in official communication. Women, too, expressed disappointment with the shortage of gender-sensitive information, including specifics on safe exit routes, childcare facilities, or women-only areas in shelters. This seen indifference validated their belief that official communication neither satisfied their needs nor prioritized them. Women, therefore, occasionally turned more to nearby volunteers and neighbors than to official groups. This shows how trust or the lack of it shaped women's crisis communication efforts during the 2025 floods.

Theme 5: Digital Divide, Device Access, and Technology Barriers

Digital disparity became a clear communication obstacle for women during the 2025 floods. Many homes only had one internet-enabled phone, typically under male family control. Women's access to mobile devices was limited, hence their capacity to get SMS alerts, read news updates, or take part in online social groups. Effective contact was hampered by poor digital literacy, lack of knowledge of government applications, and inability to negotiate social media platforms, even when devices were present. Furthermore, worsening these problems were power outages and network outages during the floods, depriving women of real-time knowledge. Study participants shared that they felt isolated and dependent on others and male family members for news, which increased their level of vulnerability. Women in flood-affected areas were also not able to confirm the speculations, call emergency services, or independently grab relief information due to the digital gap. This theme emphasizes how technological obstacles cause huge gender inequalities in digital reach and literacy through Pakistan's semi-urban and rural areas, in addition to cultural and social hurdles.

Theme 6: Post-Disaster Vulnerability and Safety Gaps

The sixth and last theme is about the communication needs when the flood water goes down, and people try to stay safe and get support. This information is usually dispatched through the same male-dominant communication network, which is used for early warnings, alerts, and time and location for aid distribution facilities. This communication makes it difficult or sometimes impossible for women who cannot travel alone. Notably, sometimes, women cannot securely report gender abuse, gender-based violence, or misuse of aid during relief activities due to limited private, trustworthy, and institutionalized communication networks. This absence of proper communication provides a shield to criminals and keeps the environment of ambiguity and uncertainty. Women's vulnerability during a critical time gets worse due to the absence of an efficient feedback mechanism.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Results show that women often received flood alerts late or indirectly because men controlled electronic gadgets (phones), meetings, and information channels. This pattern supports earlier studies that found early warning systems in Pakistan are designed around men and exclude women from direct communication (Mustafa et al., 2015; Shah et al., 2022). Research findings from the South Asian country

of Bangladesh also verify that information gaps due to gender increase disaster risk for women (Fatema et al., 2023; Kashif et al., 2025).

Results and findings also highlight that the marginalized mobility, the pardah tradition, and dependency on male family members prevented women from reaching governmental communication hubs. These findings are aligned with available South Asian research literature, underscoring that traditional norms hold back women's access to early warnings and evacuation opportunities during disasters (Racioppi & Rajagopalan, 2016; Raza, Iftikhar, & Kashif, 2025). Global studies on the same issues also suggest that early warning systems collapse when official authorities neglect the gendered mobility obstacles (Pudmenzky, 2022).

Fact and data indicate that women reach out to relatives, neighbors, and women-led social media accounts (especially WhatsApp groups) for in-the-moment updates. Previous studies from South Asia show that unofficial networks also play an important role when governmental warning systems are weak and male-dominated (Racioppi & Rajagopalan, 2016). International disaster research also verifies the same findings that community networks usually spread disaster-related warnings and information faster than governmental sources (Acanga et al., 2025; Ali et al., 2025; UN Women, 2025).

Respondents expressed strong doubts about official warnings due to delayed cautionary alerts and the absence of gender-sensitive details, such as safe and secure routes in women-only accommodation areas. Some prior studies suggest that women also show mistrust when governmental messages are different from the on-ground situation, or neglect their protection needs (Sultana, 2010). UN and international reports also verify that disaster communication is often not designed according to gender sensitivity.

The findings underscore that during the 2025 flood in Pakistan, women faced many issues, including limited cellphone access, digital gadgets, and dependency on male family members for access to online information. Findings from earlier research work from Pakistan highlight that the technological warning system is out of reach for women in the country, especially when they do not have control over digital devices (Shah et al., 2022). International research also validates that uneven digital access increases the vulnerability of women during times of disaster (UN Women, 2025).

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