



Independent observer
of the Global Fund

The disproportionate impact of climate change on women's health

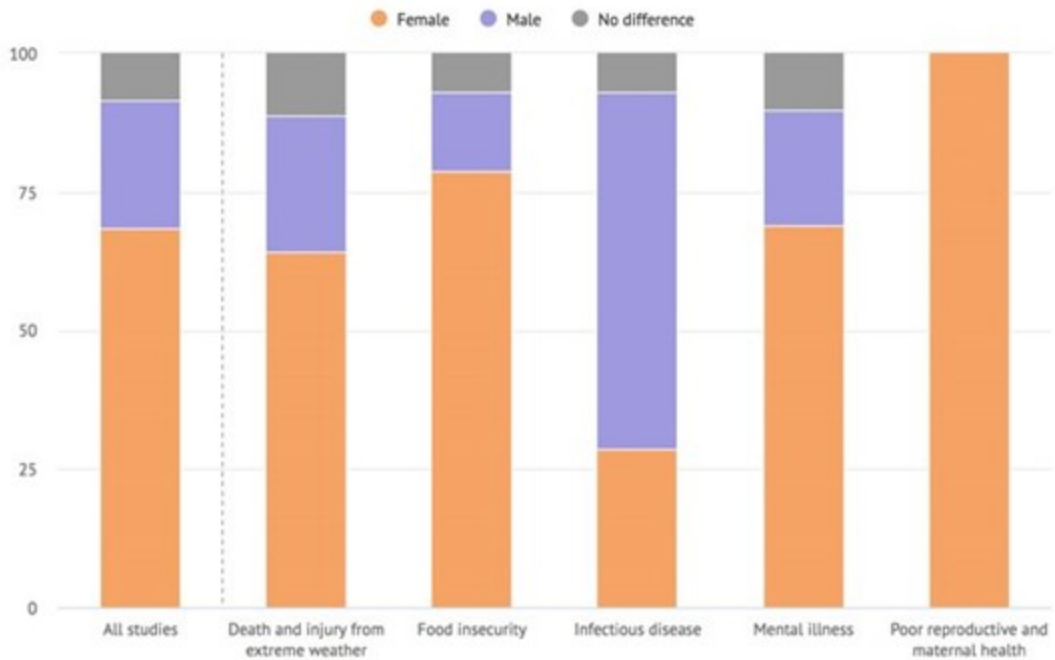
Introduction:

Climate change is not a distant threat, but a present and growing challenge, whose consequences go far beyond environmental concerns. One aspect often overlooked is its profound impact on women's health. As global temperatures rise and weather patterns become increasingly erratic, [women, particularly those in African countries and marginalized communities](#), face specific challenges and disproportionate vulnerabilities that require urgent attention. An [analysis of 130 peer-reviewed studies](#) shows that women and girls face disproportionately higher health risks than men due to the impacts of climate change.

Figure 1:

Women are more likely to be affected by most climate impacts on health

Proportion of studies finding the gender most affected is male, female or no difference (%)



Source : [How climate change disproportionately affects women's health](#)

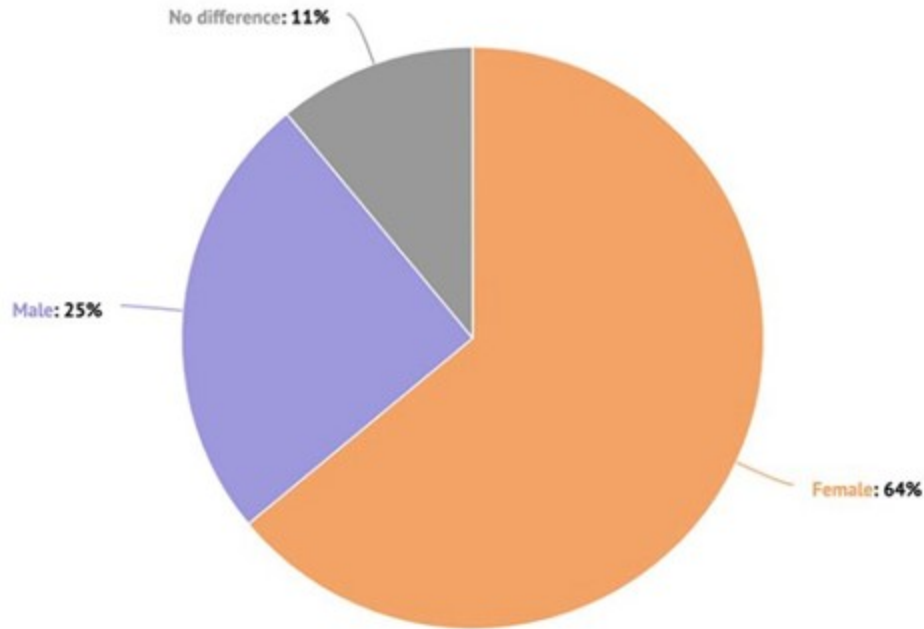
In this article, we explore the multifaceted impact of climate change on women's health and the urgent need for proactive measures to address these challenges.

1. Impact on sexual and reproductive health:

The effects of climate change have a direct impact on sexual and reproductive health, particularly during extreme weather events such as cyclones. Access to contraception is hampered, as women, focused on survival, may forget their contraceptives during evacuation, and some see their medicines destroyed or washed away by storms. In addition, displacement and migration caused by climate-related disasters can disrupt access to reproductive health services, including family planning. The meta-analysis of 130 studies cited above revealed that 68% (89) concluded that women were more affected than men by the health consequences of climate change.

Figure 2:

Nearly two-thirds of studies find women are more likely to suffer death or injury from extreme weather



Source : [How climate change disproportionately affects women's health](#)

Vector-borne diseases:

Climate change is influencing the distribution of disease vectors, such as mosquitoes and ticks, affecting the prevalence of diseases such as malaria, dengue fever, Zika virus, Lyme disease. Pregnant women, particularly in tropical and subtropical regions, are at increased risk of contracting these vector-borne diseases, with potential implications for maternal and child health.

Water and wastewater:

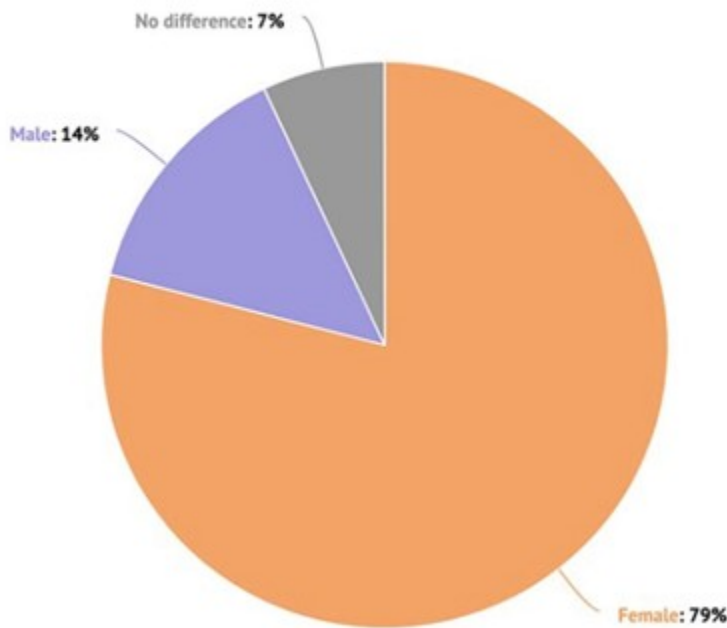
Climate change is affecting access to drinking water and sanitation, which are essential for health and hygiene. Women, who are the primary caregivers and water managers in households, bear the brunt of water scarcity due to reduced rainfall, droughts and contamination caused by flooding. The physical effort required to fetch water from remote sources can lead to increased health risks, such as musculoskeletal pain and injury. In addition, inadequate sanitary facilities expose women to additional risks of infection.

Food insecurity and nutritional challenges:

Climate change is affecting agricultural productivity, leading to changes in food availability and quality. Women, who often play a crucial role in household food production and nutrition, face increased difficulties as a result of climate change. Poor harvests, altered growing seasons and the spread of parasites have an impact on food security, contributing to malnutrition and related health problems, particularly among pregnant women and children. Inadequate nutrition and increased exposure to pollution can contribute to unfavorable pregnancy outcomes, including low birth weight and premature birth.

Figure 3:

Around 80% of studies find women are more likely to suffer climate-driven food insecurity



Source : [How climate change disproportionately affects women's health](#)

Vulnerability Socio-economic:

Women, as the main managers of agriculture, are heavily affected by the devastation of the farming sector, particularly in areas exposed to extreme weather conditions. Government resettlement areas, where women and children predominate, lack economic opportunities and result in an unstable lifestyle, between frequent moves to farmland and neighborhoods. Cultural norms limit paid employment opportunities for women, often leaving them alone to provide for their families, exposing them to violence and poverty. Some women turn to risky jobs, compromising their reproductive health, to support their families and save for future disasters.

Gender-based violence exacerbated by climate change:

[Displacement, resource scarcity and competition for livelihoods resulting from climate change often contribute to increased vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence.](#) In particular, the devastation of homes, food sources and jobs can force women and girls to seek refuge in insecure locations, undertake long and dangerous journeys to obtain food and water, and engage in increased work that puts them at greater risk of violence. Young girls are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and prostitution in times of crisis.

Gender norms and inequalities:

[Gender norms and inequalities exacerbate the effects of climate change by disempowering women to make crucial decisions.](#) Indeed, women's historical role as caregivers places them in a leadership position in preparing their families for evacuation before a storm, and in the multiple decisions involved in that preparation. However, despite this predominant role, they often lack the power to decide when to evacuate.

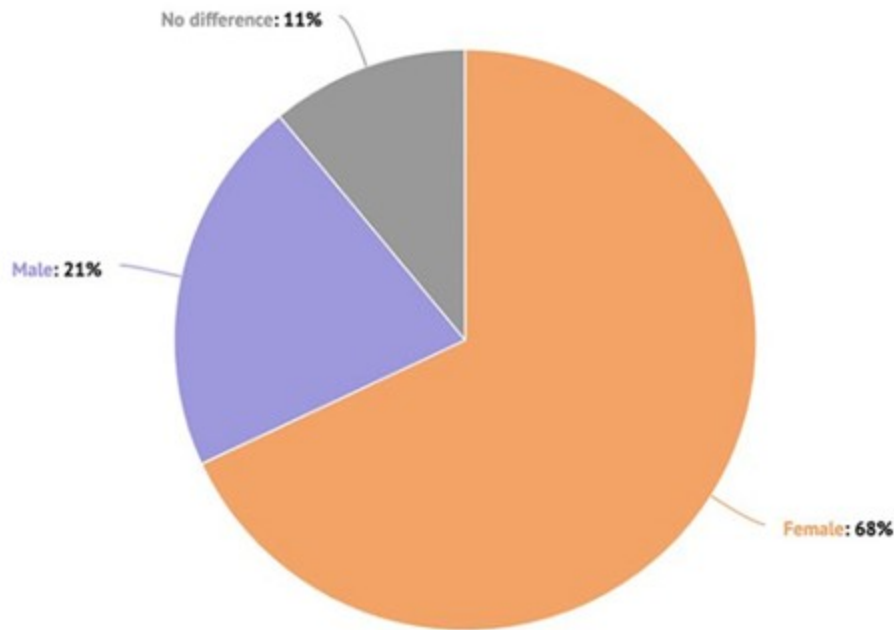
In Mozambique, a woman shared her experience of how her husband's absence during a cyclone deprived her of access to emergency health care, as she needed his permission. In Bangladesh, the practice of purdah, which involves covering oneself completely to avoid being seen by men, hinders some women's access to cyclone centers, where interaction between men and women is permitted. Traditional clothing also limits their mobility, preventing them from swimming and running, increasing the risk of drowning and injury during a storm.

Mental health:

The psychological toll of climate change is often overlooked, but it can have serious repercussions on women's mental health. Displacement, loss of livelihood and the trauma of climate-related disasters can lead to increased rates of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health problems. Women, who often assume primary responsibility for care, may experience increased stress and emotional fatigue in the face of climate-related challenges.

Figure 4:

Nearly 70% of studies find women are more likely to suffer from climate-driven mental illness



Source : [How climate change disproportionately affects women's health](#)

Conclusion

Addressing the impact of climate change on women's health requires a holistic and intersectional approach that takes into account the social, economic and cultural contexts in which women live. As the global community faces the urgent need to mitigate and adapt to climate change, it is essential to prioritize the particular health issues facing women. Climate change intensifies existing health risks and creates new ones, placing a heavier burden on women. They often face higher rates of poverty, limited access to healthcare and cultural norms that restrict their mobility and decision-making power. Climate-related disasters such as hurricanes, floods and droughts can exacerbate these problems, leading to increased health risks and reduced well-being for women. By recognizing and addressing these challenges, policymakers, health professionals and communities can work to build resilience and promote sustainable solutions that safeguard women's health and well-being in a changing climate. The time to act is now. Now.

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