

Ethical Viewpoint

Impact of Climate Change on Women's Mental HealthChitrita Sengupta Chaki¹, Ramsha Choudhary²¹Psychologist and Psychotherapist, Certified School and Career Counselor, Mental Health Professional, Kolkata.²Psychologist and Mental Health Professional, Kolkata.**Corresponding author:** Chitrita Sengupta Chaki**Email** – chitritasengupta@yahoo.com

(Paper received – 10th June 2025, Peer review completed – 20th July 2025, Accepted – 22nd July 2025)

“Climate change is the greatest threat to our existence in our short history on this planet. Nobody's going to buy their way out of its effects.”

Mark Ruffalo (Actor & Environmentalist)

Climate change is a present-day catastrophe with broad effects on the environment and human health, not a far-off threat. Its physical consequences, heat waves, floods, droughts, wildfires, and rising sea levels are well known, but its psychological costs are frequently overlooked.

Research has shown that climate change has a substantial impact on mental health, both directly and indirectly. While the stress of ongoing environmental deterioration contributes to anxiety, depression, and helplessness among affected populations, exposure to extreme climate events raises the risk of trauma-related disorders [1].

These psychological impacts are shaped by gender, social, and economic factors; they do not occur in isolation. Women bear a dual burden. They frequently serve as frontline caregivers during natural disasters yet face limited access to mental health support due to existing structural disparities. These interconnected vulnerabilities make women's mental health a crucial issue within the climate crisis.

Despite growing global awareness, gender-sensitive psychiatric research that examines how environmental stressors specifically affect women's mental well-being remains severely lacking [2]. Recognizing and addressing the psychological dimensions of climate change is essential as we work toward sustainable solutions and resilience—particularly through a gendered lens.

Climate Change and Gender Inequality

Climate change disproportionately affects populations that rely heavily on natural resources for their survival and have limited capacity to adapt to environmental shocks—particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Among these vulnerable groups, women face heightened risks due to a combination of social, economic, and cultural disadvantages.

Globally, women's roles are deeply tied to climate-sensitive responsibilities such as water collection, food security, and agriculture. This close connection, while highlighting their potential as change-makers, also places them at the frontline of climate-related hardships [2]. The lack of gender-specific data and indicators on climate change responses continues to mask the true extent of their struggles and contributions.

In many parts of the world, particularly in rural and impoverished communities, women are more likely than men to suffer the consequences of climate change. Their underrepresentation in policymaking, limited access to land rights, financial resources, and decision-making platforms further widen the gender gap in climate resilience [2]. As a result, their voices are often excluded from climate planning and response strategies, making those efforts less effective and inclusive.

However, women also hold valuable traditional knowledge and leadership skills in sustainable resource management. Studies have shown that when women participate meaningfully in climate governance, the outcomes of environmental projects are more effective and equitable. Conversely,

failing to include women can reinforce pre-existing inequalities and reduce the success of climate interventions.

Impact of Climate Change on Women's Mental Health

Climate change has wide-ranging mental health impacts, which can occur before, during, or after a climate-related event. These effects range from mild emotional distress to severe clinical conditions such as anxiety, depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and suicidal ideation. However, women, especially those from vulnerable socio-economic backgrounds—experience these effects more acutely and more frequently.

During extreme climate events such as floods, droughts, wildfires, or cyclones, women are often tasked with caregiving responsibilities while also being more likely to experience displacement, food insecurity, and loss of livelihood. These conditions contribute to an increase in trauma-related stress and mental health disorders. Studies show that women affected by natural disasters are significantly more likely to develop PTSD than men, particularly when they are pregnant, caring for children, or lacking access to healthcare [1].

Beyond immediate trauma, climate change contributes to chronic stress through long-term changes in daily life. Displacement from one's home, community disintegration, and loss of livelihood have been linked to heightened rates of depression and anxiety in women. In rural communities, where women are often the primary food producers and water collectors, the pressure of managing diminishing resources can lead to feelings of hopelessness, exhaustion, and psychological burnout [3].

Additionally, climate-related disruptions can amplify gender-based violence. For instance, evidence from post-disaster contexts such as the 2015 Nepal earthquake and the 2016 Haiti hurricane indicates a sharp rise in domestic violence, early marriage, and sexual exploitation—factors that severely compromise women's mental health and autonomy [2].

Women may also experience what is now being called “eco-anxiety”, a chronic fear of environmental doom. This condition is worsened by a perceived lack of agency and inadequate access to resources or platforms for advocacy. With limited involvement in decision-making processes, many women feel powerless in shaping the future of their families and communities in the face of climate change.

In summary, the mental health consequences of climate change on women are complex, cumulative, and deeply interconnected with existing social and structural inequalities. Addressing these impacts requires integrated mental health support systems and a gender-responsive approach to climate resilience.

Conclusion

Climate change is not just an environmental issue—it is a human issue, and more importantly, a deeply gendered one. The psychological impacts of climate disruptions are real, rising, and disproportionately borne by women. From trauma during natural disasters to long-term emotional distress rooted in displacement, resource scarcity, and social inequality, women face unique and layered mental health challenges in the face of environmental instability.

Despite this, the intersection of gender, climate change, and mental health remains severely under-researched and under-addressed in both academic and policy spaces. Recognizing the unique vulnerabilities of women, while also empowering them as agents of resilience, is essential for building a sustainable and mentally healthy future.

To truly address the climate crisis, we must adopt a holistic and inclusive lens—one that integrates mental health care, gender equity, and environmental sustainability in every step of the response.

REFERENCES

1. World Health Organization. (2022). Climate change and health. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>

2. UN Women. (2022). Climate change is worsening gender-based violence against women and girls. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2022/10/feature-climate-change-is-worsening-gender-based-violence-against-women-and-girls>
3. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2021). Gender equality and climate change. <https://www.undp.org/publications/gender-equality-and-climate-change>

Acknowledgements – Nil

Conflict of Interest – Nil

Funding – Nil.