

Positive Masculinity and Disaster Preparedness in Pakistani Urban Communities

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the intersection of positive masculinity and disaster preparedness in Pakistani urban communities. Through focus group discussions with 24 men aged 19 and above from Rawalpindi and Peshawar, the research highlights the transformative potential of positive masculinities in enhancing community resilience. The findings reveal that men in Pakistan have both traditional and positive perception of masculinity. Men with positive masculine traits, such as emotionality, responsibility, and perceiving women as allies are advocating for change. They can facilitate women's active participation in disaster preparedness efforts. These men emerge as pivotal agents in creating a conducive environment for collaboration, communication, and collective action in disaster mitigation and response. The study underscores the need to redefine traditional gender roles and promote gender-sensitive approaches that recognize and harness the strengths of both men and women in disaster risk reduction efforts within Pakistani urban contexts. It fosters inclusive and resilient communities in the face of disasters.

Keywords: Positive masculinity, disaster preparedness, gender roles, urban communities

Introduction and Background

Disasters, whether natural or man-made, pose a significant threat to nations across the globe. Pakistan is vulnerable to various types of disasters, including floods, earthquakes, and droughts, which have caused widespread damage and loss. Effective disaster preparedness is crucial for mitigating the impact of these events, particularly in urban areas like Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Peshawar, which are prone to earthquakes, fires, and flooding (National Disaster Management Authority [NDMA], 2022; Ansari et al., 2019; Qasim et al., 2016; Siddique & Akhtar, 2020). These urban areas are particularly more vulnerable as they are thickly populated, hub of economic activities and home to poor people (Rana & Routray, 2018).

Disasters are much gendered in nature and thus the preparedness for disasters should be gender inclusive. The literature on gender and disasters emphasizes the contrast in how men and women plan for, handle, and recover from disasters. Studies reveal that the way men and women perceive hazard and react to alerts about forthcoming catastrophes is different. Men are more inclined than women to want to stay and put out the fire, while

women are more likely to seek refuge (Pease, 2014). This variation is influenced by gender roles socially constructed within a society.

Pakistan's social structure is influenced by the patriarchy and binary gender roles clearly divide men and women into specific roles. Similarly, masculinity and femininity are seen as opposite poles of a continuum (Ahmed et al., 2021). The concept of masculinity is diverse and multidimensional, impacted by a range of elements such as personal experiences, familial context, and cultural standards (Levant, 2007; Jabeen, 2018; Sinn, 1997). Connell (1995) defines masculinity as social construct which comprises of all the norms, behaviors and expectations which are attached with being a man in any society. In Pakistani society, men are expected to be strong, able to protect their family particularly women and unemotional in their demeanor (Ullah & Chaudhry, 2021). Adhering to these traditional traits of masculinity encourages men to behave in a certain way and it has significance for disaster preparedness. For instance, studies show that men in Pakistan use negative coping strategies including aggression, addiction and other harmful behavior when they are in stressful situations. Cases of domestic violence rise during disasters and crisis. (Chaudhry & Amis, 2021; Soomar et al., 2023). Additionally, it may put pressure on men to be protectors during disasters and it may challenge their ability to learn new disaster preparedness skills which increase the community's resilience.

Researchers have highlighted the need to challenge these traditional ideas of masculinity and promote positive masculinity approach to address these challenges particularly in the context of disaster management. This can be achieved through mass awareness campaigns on gender sensitization, empowerment and promoting men with positive masculine identities (Aurat Foundation, 2018). Michael Flood highlights the dual role of men as a hegemonic group increasing inequality and a catalyst for empowerment by being allies. He emphasized that excluding men from women gender mainstreaming activities may lead them to become more toxic in their masculine roles and creates a pressure on women alone to promote gender equality. In contrast, he advocates to consider men as agents of change so that they feel responsibility to work gender equality. He has identified three main areas in which he advocates male engagement. First is the need to collaborate with men in the roles of decision makers and providers. Secondly, involve men in development agendas using gender sensitive framework. Finally work on men and their vulnerabilities. In this regard, major focus has been in the context of GBV and health. However few researches have highlighted their role in disaster context as well. They have discussed that when men are engaged in activities for enhancing disaster preparedness, they become allies of women and act as catalyst to increase women participation. Thus, communities become more resilient with positive masculinity (Mustafa et al., 2015; Dunn, 2016).

The main objective of this study focused on exploring the role of positive masculinity in promoting disaster preparedness among communities of selected urban areas in Pakistan. The research question inquires how do men with positive masculine traits

perceive their role in disaster preparedness and to what extent do they collaborate or facilitate women's role?

Theoretical Framework

For the current research, Connell's theory of masculinities is selected as a theoretical framework as this theory has major implications for disaster management. Connell published his theory of multiple masculinities in 1995 which posits that masculinity is a socially constructed schema moulded by sociocultural norms of a society (Connell, 1995). He explains that masculinity is not a singular concept but constructed over a continuum of traits close or far from cultural ideals. On one hand he defines hegemonic masculinity which is dominant in patriarchal cultures, characterising men as assertive, authoritarian, heterosexual, and brave. Boys and men are deemed manly based on how well they conform to this normative idea. Connell's (2000) categorization of subjugated and marginalised masculinities is also helpful in comprehending the connection between gender and how it intersects with other stratum elements like sexual orientation, class, and race. Connell (2000) employs these ideas to show how hierarchy and exclusion characterise the multiplicity of masculinities. Therefore, critical masculinity studies which view masculinity as interpersonal, socially constructed, enacted, and institutionally embedded have a great deal to offer critical social work perspectives on men and women in disasters as well as to gender and disaster studies more broadly.

Figure 1

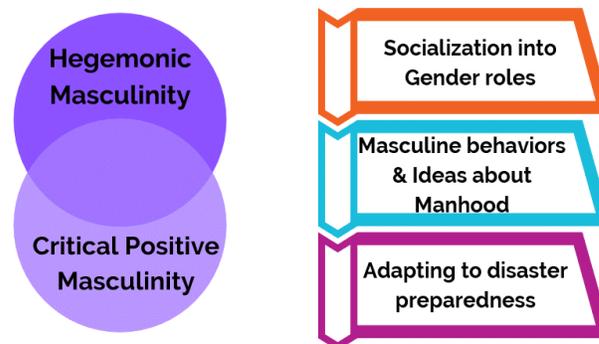


Figure 1 represents theory of Critical positive masculinity in the context of disasters.

Connell assumes that men are able to constructively resist or redefine traditional hegemonic norms and create more positive or inclusive masculinities that are more conducive to health and wellbeing. Thus, he advocates a new perspective in gender studies 'Critical positive Masculinity' exploring the complex potential for positive change in men. This theory can be very crucial in the context of disaster response and preparedness as it will aid in comprehending the role of masculine traits in shaping men's behaviors during disaster response and recovery. We have already discussed the need for gender sensitive disaster management strategies. Without taking into account men as well as women, these efforts cannot be fruitful.

Methodology

Research Design

With a qualitative research approach, the study was designed using focus group discussions (FGDs) as our selected method, a commonly used technique involving an in-depth discussion on a given topic. The group is generally between 6 to maximum 12 persons. The main advantage of this method is that it can yield rich information by giving opportunity to the participants to engage in meaningful discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2014).

Sample and Data Collection

The FGDs were conducted with a total of 24 men aged 19-50 years, recruited from the urban cities of Rawalpindi and Peshawar, Pakistan. The steps of FGD included planning, facilitation, documentation and content analysis and data collection was carried out in the following steps: Planning phase: The research objectives were clearly defined, and a semi-structured FGD question guide was developed to facilitate the discussions. 20 Potential participants were identified through purposive sampling and contacted to seek their consent belonging to Peshawar and Rawalpindi. 17 responded positively and 12 each were finalized from both cities based on availability.

Facilitation phase: Two FGDs were conducted, one in each city, from March 2024 to April 2024. Each lasting between 1 hour 45 minutes to 1 hour 50 minutes. A moderator guided the discussions, using probes to encourage participation from all attendees, while maintaining a neutral stance. Audio recordings were made with the consent of the participants. The moderator initiated each FGD with brief introduction and posed each question one by one. She used probes and involved all participants in the conversation without expressing any value to their answers to keep it neutral. At the end of each discussion, participants were thanked for their time. They were provided tea and snacks. No summary was provided at the end as this is a recommended method for conducted FGD (Rice & Ezzy, 1999; Anderson 1990).

Documentation Phase: The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim by a note-taker immediately after each FGD, as recommended by qualitative research experts (Anderson, 1990; Rice & Ezzy, 1999).

Content Analysis Phase: The transcripts were analyzed using a grounded theory-based thematic analysis approach. The researchers reviewed the data, identified recurring themes and patterns, and developed a coding framework. Verbatim quotes were used to support the interpretation of the findings. Verbatim was added with each theme to completely link the interpretation with the participants' own perceptions as recommended by Anderson (1990). Findings are discussed in the next section.

Results

Table 1

Demographic profile of men who participated in FGDs (N=24)

| Characteristic | Category | frequency |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|
| Age | 19 to 24 years | 5 |
| | 25 to 30 years | 5 |
| | 31 to 39 years | 2 |
| | 40 to 49 years | 5 |
| | 50 and above | 7 |
| Education | Informal Education/ Primary school | 10 |
| | Matric | 5 |
| | Intermediate | 4 |
| | Undergraduate | 4 |
| | Post graduate | 1 |
| City | Peshawar | 12 |
| | Rawalpindi | 12 |
| Native Language | Urdu | 3 |
| | Punjabi | 10 |
| | Pashto | 9 |
| | Kashmiri | 2 |
| Marital Status | Married | 14 |
| | Single | 10 |
| Employment status | Employed | 13 |
| | Unemployed | 11 |

The demographic characteristics of our participants are presented above which indicate the diversity of the participants included in the discussion to get many viewpoints and representation of the population of both cities. Based on the data analysis, Two overarching themes were identified:

- I. Traditional Masculine Identity and Responsibility
- II. Men, Women and Disaster Preparedness

These themes which included subsequent subthemes are discussed below with illustrative quotes from the participants.

Theme 1: Traditional Versus Positive Masculine Identity

This emerged as a major theme in our discussion around disaster preparedness. All of the participants were highly aware of their traditional masculine identity and most of them

recognized the pressure of responsibilities which are associated with it. They expressed that being a man is their foremost identity which influences their behaviors in every aspect of their lives. Further sub-themes were identified pertaining to the masculine identity.

Man as Protector and Provider:

This sub theme was expressed by all of the men above 40 who participated in the discussion that they identify the role of men as protectors and providers of their families. They believed that to help, provide and protect their family is what a real man must do. They did not see any other way to be real men and have to be strong at all times. According to one participant:

Man is foundation of house. If the base is weak then house will fall into pieces (53, Peshawar, FGD 1).

These findings are consistent with the existing literature as Ullah and Chaudry (2021) have explained that traditional ideals of masculinity are hegemonic and men tend to perceive ideal manhood as being strong and identify with breadwinner role.

On the other hand, younger participants had a different opinion. They recognized that traditional role is not their ideal manhood, they can say no to being protector but in cultural norms, there is no option to say no to the provider role. Many of them believe women should contribute equally to this role. They also feel it causes stress and pressure to be strong and supportive for their family and is too much to ask. As one participant expressed:

We men are expected and perceived to be strong and heroic, which creates unrealistic expectations and pressure to take unnecessary risks. Women are strong too. They don't need to be dependent on us, they can share our burden. (28, Rawalpindi, FGD 1)

This shows that alternative perceptions of masculine identity exist and not all men are falling for hegemonic masculine identity. This is what Connell (2000) has explained in his theory on masculinities are they are negotiated in different ways in a society.

Strength Versus Vulnerability

This theme was reported by older men above 30 years. They highlighted that masculinity includes traits of strength and courage. Men should be brave and face any challenge boldly. Since a man is expected to earn and protect their family, if he is not strong enough to perform roles or responsibilities he won't be respected. They also talked about taking risks for family and community. One participant said:

Man is like wall who can face any challenge. He becomes a shield for his children. (60, Rawalpindi, FGD2).

Young age men below 30 years reported and shared different insights about masculinity. They have flexibility in attitude about roles if men of this community. According to them men can also express that they have emotions and feelings. It is okay for a man to be afraid sometimes and they don't have to face all the risks. They can also panic in crisis situations. They mentioned that mental and emotional wellbeing of men is neglected in disaster situations and even physical injuries are taken for granted as compared to women. As one participant said:

It is not in every case for men to be strong enough. I have a fear of blood and I can't help an injured person if they are bleeding. It doesn't mean I am not a man. A man can have fears too. (24, Peshawar, FGD 1).

These findings are supported by literature that more mental health problems are prevalent in men post disaster as their emotional needs are neglected. They suffer more from anxiety, depression or stress as compared to women (Rao, 2006).

Theme 2: Men, Women and Disaster Preparedness

Men in the two FDGs were very well aware of disaster and its mitigation plans related to common disasters in respective cities. They expressed mixed opinions about including women as helping hand in disaster rescue and preparedness procedures. Most of them identified feminine role of women with household, domestic chores and caretaking of children or elderly in their families. In regard to their collaboration in disaster preparedness, mixed reviews were found. They are discussed in following sub themes emerged:

Women as allies

Under this subtheme, young men above 30 expressed that including women in disaster preparedness and post disaster activities is vital for swift outcomes and less vulnerabilities. Young men think that women can also help and support in crisis situations and as they are the one who know household matters much better than men. They can be more valuable partners in terms of decision making and finding helping way out in community settings. They mentioned that women bring unique perspectives that can greatly contribute to more comprehensive disaster preparedness and response and women should be better included in disaster trainings for measures and rescue so that we can reduce the casualties. According to one participant:

My sister is better than me at handling crisis. By valuing and integrating women's perspectives, we can foster a more inclusive and resilient community that works

together to mitigate risks and support each other during crises (20, Rawalpindi, FGD 1).

Women as supporters

The men above 30 reported on this sub theme. They viewed women more as supporters and followers rather than leaders in disaster related activities. Their traditional gender roles and perception influenced their attitudes towards women. They do recognize that norms are changing in contemporary Pakistani society. As one participant expressed:

In our days women rarely went out. So, they cannot handle crisis. But yes, they can help men in dealing with crisis by providing support. Nowadays things are different. (55, Peshawar, FGD2).

Collaboration and Support between genders

Majority of the men advocate trainings for women for disaster situation and show willingness to support them for this purpose. As women are more involved in household and care work, they know better how to handle children and elders in disasters and are also very much familiar with the house infrastructure for safety and rescue purpose. Men point out that men's position in society can be used as functional and eliminating power imbalance rather than obstacle for each of them; men and women. Men acknowledge women have certain capacities especially in child and elderly care to enhance disaster preparedness and response capabilities.

In our community, everyone needs to be prepared to handle emergencies, regardless of gender. I think all brothers and fathers should encourage their sisters and daughters to become well trained (40, Rawalpindi, FGD 1).

This finds support in previous studies. Many men who are educated in Pakistan empower their female members of the family to get education, careers etc. (Malik & Courtney, 2011).

Advocating for Change

This subtheme highlights men advocating for policy changes that promote inclusivity and gender equality in disaster preparedness. They are of the view that these efforts can help the females of their community and families in future. This includes just and fair policies for disaster preparedness and post disaster allocation of resources. They recognize the importance of diverse perspectives and experiences, moreover they call for better planning and effective community resilience training for women and men. Both need better and professional trainings including First Aid, rescue training and disaster awareness. One participant of the study explained:

Changes need to be made in existing plan of action for disasters. Community leaders and organizations can better support women in disaster resilience by creating inclusive policies and programs that prioritize women's voices and needs (41, Peshawar, FGD 2).

Literature highlights that gender needs have been recognized in the context of disaster management. Many efforts for gender mainstreaming in the society are already underway by different stakeholders including government, NGOs and civil society. Studies have critically evaluated policies for their gender blindness and demanded reforms which include disaster management (Aurat Foundation, 2018; Ullah & Chaudhry, 2021).

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the complex relationship between masculinity and disaster preparedness in Pakistani urban communities. The focus group discussions revealed two key themes. Older men expressed a strong attachment to traditional masculinity, viewing men as protectors and providers. However, younger participants advocated for a more flexible approach that allows men to express vulnerability and collaborate with women. Participants acknowledged the importance of involving women, with younger men seeing them as valuable allies. While older men tended to view women in traditional supportive roles, the majority expressed willingness to support women's inclusion in disaster preparedness. These findings highlight the need to redefine gender norms and promote positive masculinity emphasizing resilience, responsibility, compassion, and collaboration. By empowering men to embrace these qualities, and actively involving women, communities can foster a more inclusive and resilient approach to crisis management. Further research is needed to explore the nuances of this relationship in diverse cultural settings and to develop evidence-based strategies for promoting gender-inclusive disaster risk reduction and response.

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Nadia Bukhtawer is an experienced lecturer in the Department of Gender Studies at Fatima Jinnah Women University, a seasoned researcher and a practicing psychologist, currently pursuing her PhD in Sociology. She holds an MPhil in International Development Studies and a Master's in Clinical Psychology. Her research focuses on psychosocial

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