

CHALLENGES FACED BY COMMUNITY WORKERS DURING FLOOD RELIEF EFFORTS IN SINDH

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Abstract

This paper examines the challenges faced by community volunteers involved in flood relief efforts in Benazir Abad, Sindh. The study highlights the logistical, emotional, and physical challenges encountered in disaster response through a diverse participant sample. In challenging situations such as prolonged exposure to floods, limited shelter, and restricted access to essential services, community workers face significant health risks. Emotional stress, encompassing trauma, exhaustion, and stress, further intensifies their challenges; female employees face additional safety concerns and restricted mobility. Efforts to provide relief are significantly hindered by logistical challenges such as delays in assistance delivery, budget limitations, and inefficiencies in administration. The study emphasizes the importance of enhanced organizational support, mental health services, and strategic policy initiatives to bolster the resilience and sustainability of flood relief efforts. Improved training, strategic resource allocation, and enhanced mental health support can significantly bolster disaster management systems, ensuring a more effective and sustainable response to disasters in the region.

Keywords: Disaster relief, community workers, flood response

Introduction

According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR,2019), floods are among the natural disasters that occur often and inflict the most damage on a global scale. They have the potential to have an impact on millions of people and to do considerable damage to individuals, communities, and the environment. The findings of a study that was conducted by Alam and Rahman (2020) indicate that the impacts of floods are making the situation worse in a number of developing nations. This is due to the fact that several developing countries have poor infrastructure, inadequate disaster preparation measures, and bad urban planning. Community workers are able to provide impacted populations with immediate assistance in the form of medical treatment, temporary relief, and emotional support when they are active in relief and recovery efforts during times of disaster. This is why it is crucial for community workers to be involved in these activities. Their contributions are of the highest significance in order to guarantee that underprivileged groups, such as women, children, and the elderly, are provided with the resources that are essential for their survival and rehabilitation (Shah et al., 2022). Nevertheless, despite their fervor and devotion, these workers are forced to face substantial hurdles that hinder the efficacy of their efforts.

Since floods severely damaged much of the water infrastructure in the impacted regions, more than 5.4 million people now depend on contaminated sources including wells and ponds for their water supply (Disaster Philanthropy, 2022; World Bank, 2022;

UNICEF,2023).Considered as a disaster-prone country with frequent major natural disasters, particularly floods, Pakistan is ranked among the countries with the highest catastrophe risk ratings. On the Global Climate Risk Index, Pakistan is sixth among World Bank countries (2019). Disasters also exacerbate gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse. Awareness-raising, education, and the issue of warnings appear to be key initiatives to mitigate or prevent flood morbidity and mortality, especially among people living in low- and middle-income countries. This emphasizes how sensitive the country is to climate change and associated effects. Other prevalent social problems like increased poverty rates and gender inequality aggravate this sensitivity to disasters. Furthermore, when it comes to connecting individuals who are disadvantaged with essential social and health services, community-based organizations and community care professionals, especially community health workers, perform a role that is vitally significant (Ashraf et al., 2025). Pakistan has been facing severe floods over the past few years, causing significant damage to its economy. The floods have had a massive impact on agriculture, infrastructure, and human lives, resulting in long-term economic consequences (Khan, 2011; Atif et al., 2021).

. Natural disasters have shaped human history, livelihoods, and the state of health and mental well-being. These disasters occur at periodic intervals, yet they always surprise humankind with their extent and severity thresholds (Abdullha & Assocaites,2022).

Nevertheless, in the context of natural disasters, their capacity for rapid deployment, adaptability to changing circumstances, and availability of essential supplies make them remarkable characters in the field of healthcare when it comes to healthcare. The occurrence of natural disasters is inescapable; nevertheless, the repercussions of these catastrophes do not necessarily have to bring to an increase in the inequality that already exists. By making health equality a major priority, investing in community health workers and other frontline community providers, and putting inclusive policies into place, we may minimize the vulnerability of populations that are already at a disadvantage (Pear Suite, 2023).

Significance of Study

This study is significant as it provides perceptive study of the challenges and experiences community workers involved in flood relief operations come across. Moreover, analyzing their reasons, emotional responses, and coping mechanisms allows the research to highlight the psychological and social consequences of disaster relief work. This study enriches the existing literature on disaster response by offering a deeper understanding of the personal and professional challenges faced by frontline workers in crisis situations. The insights gained can guide future research, shaping more effective policies for disaster management and strengthening community resilience. By highlighting both the emotional and logistical hurdles of relief work, this study aspires to foster a more sustainable and supportive environment for those who dedicate themselves to aiding disaster-affected communities.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the experiences and perceptions of community workers involved in flood relief efforts. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants based on specific inclusion criteria, ensuring that only those with direct and relevant experience were included.

Inclusion Criteria

Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

Direct Involvement

Community workers who actively participated in relief operations in flood-affected areas of Benazir Abad Sindh.

Duration of Experience

Individuals who had spent varying lengths of time assisting flood victims to capture diverse perspectives.

Firsthand Interaction

Those who personally met and assisted flood victims rather than working in administrative or logistical roles.

Gender Representation

A balanced sample of 12 male and 12 female community workers to ensure a comprehensive understanding of experiences across genders.

Ethical Considerations and Consent

Participants were provided with a detailed information sheet outlining the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to share their experiences freely while ensuring that key research objectives were addressed. Moreover, the information collection included individual face-to-face interviews lasting 30 to 45 minutes, using open-ended questions to investigate participants' motives, obstacles, and emotional reactions. The recordings were conducted (with permission) to guarantee precise transcription. Moreover, field observations were performed, during which researchers followed community workers to get direct insights into their working circumstances and coping strategies. All interviews have been recorded with verbatim, and the data was anonymized and securely kept ensuring participant anonymity.

Data Validation and Reliability

To ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of the data, several validation steps were taken. Participants reviewed their responses to confirm accuracy, while cross-checking was used to compare data from interviews, field observations, and other sources for consistency. Additionally, peer review helped reduce bias by allowing experts to assess the findings. These measures ensured that the data was accurate, reliable, and credible for the study.

Results

The sample exhibited equitable gender representation, ensuring the incorporation of both male and female viewpoints. This balance is significant, as previous research suggests that gender influences the interactions between relief workers and victims, along with the management of emotional stress (Lokot & Avakyan, 2020). The participation of female community workers provides important insights into gender-sensitive approaches in disaster relief, often overlooked in primarily male-led humanitarian efforts. With 42% of the participants falling between 31 and 40, most of them clearly involve mid-career professionals in relief efforts.

A minority (12%) were over 50 years old, suggesting that elderly people were less involved, most likely because fieldwork is physically taxing. Studies show that although elder workers provide essential strategic decision-making and leadership, younger community workers often show more flexibility and a desire to undertake demanding jobs (Paton, 2019). A substantial proportion of participants possessed a bachelor's degree (50%), and 29% held a master's degree, indicating that most relief workers had formal education.

The elevated level of educational attainment may have enhanced organizational skills, communication abilities, and problem-solving strategies in the context of relief efforts. Nonetheless, 21% possessed only a high school education, indicating the participation of individuals with varied educational backgrounds and underscoring the inclusivity of community work. The majority of participants (67%) possessed more than five years of experience in community service, while 29% had over a decade of involvement. This finding indicates that the relief effort was predominantly conducted by experienced professionals with prior expertise in disaster response. Studies show that seasoned community workers often cultivate resilience, robust networking skills, and enhanced crisis management capabilities, thereby increasing their effectiveness in delivering support (Twigg, 2018). Only 12% of those who participated in relief activities for one to three months stayed active for more than six months. This suggests that long-term dedication to flood assistance was constrained, maybe owing to fatigue, personal limits, or resource restrictions.

Previous research shows that extended participation in humanitarian activities may cause psychological stress and tiredness, which calls for appropriate mental health care and incentives to maintain relief operations (Eriksson et al., 2019).

The results demonstrate the complex nature of disaster relief efforts and stress both the main difficulties faced by community workers and their inherent motives. Participants described complicated physical and mental hurdles in disaster response. For instance, long hours and dangerous working conditions were often highlighted. Working on large-scale humanitarian situations caused personnel to feel exhausted, useless, and frustrated. Moreover, participants demonstrated a significant personal commitment to their work, frequently attributing this to social responsibility and previous experiences.

Cultural influences significantly shaped their engagement, as many workers perceived their service as a moral duty rather than a professional obligation (Enarson & Chakrabarti, 2009; Clemens et al., 2020). Moreover, Relief workers experience emotional stress and fatigue, according to the observation. Members struggled to balance work and life, frequently disregarding their own health. Logistical factors including inadequate resources and bureaucratic inefficiency made things worse. Safety was another issue since people worked in unpredictable, high-risk conditions (David & Enarson, 2012).

According to analysis due to extended exposure to disaster-affected regions and human suffering, relief workers often reported experiencing stress and trauma. Nonetheless, a common theme was resilience, with many people creating coping mechanisms to control their emotional health. In order to protect against the psychological effects of relief work, peer support and organizational help were essential, underscoring the need to have a solid support system.

The results suggest that disaster relief workers' mental health and well-being need immediate governmental changes. Better psychological support, training, and resource allocation may reduce relief work's negative impacts. Long-term support systems may also keep workers engaged and productive. Disaster aid situations were often described as unpredictable, which meant that people had to make quick decisions under pressure.

There were always worries about health and safety, especially in places where there was fighting or where the infrastructure wasn't stable. Because of these unknowns, it became clearer that crisis reaction efforts need to be improved by using flexible strategies and thorough risk management frameworks. Female workers often prioritize personal safety, emotional risks, and burnout, given their caregiving roles and vulnerability in unstable environments. In contrast, male workers focus more on logistical challenges and physical

risks but may underreport emotional strain due to societal expectations. These differences highlight the need for gender-sensitive support systems in disaster relief (WHO, 2021).

Conclusion

The study highlights the dual reality of disaster relief work—profound challenges coupled with deep personal commitment. The demographic analysis suggests that the study sample was diverse in terms of age, gender, education, and experience, providing a well-rounded perspective on flood relief work. The equal gender distribution, high educational background, and substantial experience levels among participants indicate a strong and capable workforce. However, the limited long-term involvement points to challenges in sustaining relief efforts, emphasizing the need for better support systems, incentives, and training programs to ensure continued engagement in disaster response.

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Demographic of Participants

Demographic Breakdown			
Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	12	50%
	Female	12	50%
Age Group	20–30 years	6	25%
	31–40 years	10	42%
	41–50 years	5	21%
	51 years and above	3	12%
Educational Level	High School	5	21%
	Bachelor's Degree	12	50%
	Master's Degree	7	29%
Years of Experience in Community Work	1–5 years	8	33%
	6–10 years	9	38%
	11+ years	7	29%
Duration of Flood Relief Involvement	Less than 1 month	5	21%
	1–3 months	10	42%
	4–6 months	6	25%

More than 63	12%

Theme and Key Aspects of Study Participants

Theme	Key Aspects
Experiences and Challenges of Community Workers	Firsthand experiences, physical and emotional strain, harsh working conditions
Motivations for Engaging in Relief Work	Personal commitment, social responsibility, prior experiences, cultural influences
Challenges Faced in Disaster Relief Efforts	Emotional burden, burnout, logistical issues, safety concerns, work-life balance
Emotional and Psychological Impact	Stress, trauma, resilience, coping strategies, role of peers and organizational support
Policy Implications for Disaster Management	Mental health support, better training, resource allocation, long-term support systems
Risk and Uncertainty in Disaster Relief	Health and safety risks, unpredictable situations, decision-making under pressure