

# From Ecology to Emergency Care: An Ecofeminist Exploration of Gender, Health, and Sustainable Development

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## Abstract

The ongoing issues of climate change together with environmental destruction show how different genders experience vulnerability which results in negative effects on women's health and well-being. This paper uses an ecofeminist approach to study how sustainable development goals 5 (gender equality) and 13 (climate action) link structural gender discrimination with ecological changes that impact human health. Through its interdisciplinary qualitative research the study shows how women in society face health risks from climate change because of their caregiving responsibilities and their limited ability to participate in decision-making. The research gap exists because climate and sustainability policies fail to include women's health experiences which especially affects medical sociology research. The paper suggests gender responsive measures which will help achieve health goals together with ecological protection and sustainable development objectives.

**Keywords:** *ecofeminism, gender and health, climate change, SDG 5, SDG 13, medical sociology*

## INTRODUCTION

The sustainable development frameworks now prioritize gender equality and climate action because research demonstrates that climate change impacts different genders and social inequalities hinder environmental and health outcomes (UN Women, 2023). The research shows that women face greater environmental threats because structural inequalities and social norms restrict their ability to access healthcare and essential resources which are not adequately available in low and middle-income countries (Anjum & Aziz, 2025; BMC Public Health, 2024). Women's various reproductive and productive responsibilities which include caring for others and gathering water and providing food, result in greater exposure to climate risks, which creates additional health challenges (UNEP, 2024). Ecofeminism assumes that the oppression of women and nature in the system of patriarchy is interrelated, and the power asymmetry in the system is the main condition of environmental destruction and social inequalities (Echavarren, 2023; Patel, 2024). Although ecofeminist approaches become increasingly acknowledged in the field of environmental and social sciences, they are still poorly applied in the context of the public health and medical sociology, which means that the integrated research that would allow bridging the gap between the gender and ecological vulnerability and the health system reactions is required (Anjum & Aziz, 2025; Afifi et al., 2024). In this paper, the researcher seeks to explore the concept of gendered vulnerabilities in ecological and health spaces and come up with gender responsive approaches that can help in achieving sustainable and equitable results.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Climate change increases the health risks in terms of heat stress, diseases spread by vectors, water and food shortages, and mental health issues. A scoping review by Desai & Zhang (2021) has indicated that the increased exposure of women to health risks associated with climatic conditions is caused by the role of caregiving and household duties, especially in low and middle-income nations. Their article puts into the limelight the synergy of socio-economic and cultural factors on the health outcomes of women.

The primary problem, as reported by UN Women (2023), Gender Snapshot 2023, is that structural inequalities significantly limit the availability of women to the health services, economic resources, and participation in the decision-making process in the climatically affected regions. According to the report, climate-related disasters are more likely to augment the degree of gender disparities, particularly in the developing world, where women in most scenarios have less economic resources, and they are also less likely to move during emergencies. It also indicates that the weakness of women to environmental risks is highly mediated by the societal norms, governance systems, and unequal resource allocation. The report

demonstrates that gender-responsive climate policies which require inclusive governance methods need to be established to achieve equitable health security and climate change resilience. The researchers from BMC Public Health conducted their study to examine how gender equality impacts climate adaptation throughout various regions of the world. The research study employed international data to examine how gender equity indicators affect health resilience in communities that experience climate change impacts. The results showed that those societies, which are characterized by high gender equality, are more likely to exhibit better adaptive capacities, better public health response, and better resilience of the community to the environmental stressors. The paper also indicates that women's empowerment in terms of education, economic roles, and leadership will help in enhancing climate-health governance. Such findings demonstrate the role of social determinants, especially gender equality, in influencing the health outcomes in the case of climate change.

Zavala et al. (2024) used a scoping review to examine gender inequalities in the health effects of climate in various regions and groups of people. The research paper created a synthesis of evidence from various research papers to determine how vulnerable and resilient women are in climate-affected environments. The study results discovered that climate change produces physical and psychological health effects which women experience in greater numbers than men. The situation becomes worse because people cannot reach medical help and cultural challenges exist and resources are distributed inequitably. The authors draw a conclusion that a gender-sensitive approach to climate and health policies is the key to the minimization of health disparities and the introduction of sustainable climate change adaptation measures.

The research conducted by Afifi et al. in 2024 has examined how climate-related health risks affect women living in Eastern Mediterranean areas that experience climate stress. The research showed that women faced greater climate-related dangers than men which demonstrated the need for public health programs that consider gender differences. Anjum and Aziz completed their systematic literature review about climate change effects on women's health which showed that women die younger from climate-sensitive diseases because they face greater health risks in rural areas that lack medical facilities. The research suggests that climate change and health policies should include ecofeminist perspectives as part of their development process.

Rainard et al. (2023) also emphasized how the issue of systemic inequalities is the root of environmental degradation and the marginalization of women. They focus their research on the need to deal with social, ecological, and health aspects at the same time to reach sustainable development results.

Onyango et al. (2023) examined the issue of women in climate resilience and adaptation. They concluded that the ecological knowledge and participatory decision-making of women on the local level are key to successful climate-health governance, which, however, is not always used in policies.

Frank et al. (2024) have reviewed the literature on sustainability science that is related to gender. Their contribution supports the idea that the gendered approach to health should be implemented in the environmental policy to improve not only the health of the population but also the ecological stability.

In the article, Leal Filho et al. (2023) compared gender equality from the perspective of the Sustainable Development Goals, with the results demonstrating that the initiatives on women's agency and ecological knowledge could reduce the health vulnerabilities and enhance the climate adaptation outcomes.

Pinho-Gomes et al. (2023) compared the relationship between gender inequality and climate adaptation across the world and found that the societies that have a higher degree of gender equity have fewer health risks due to climate in women, which proves the policy gap in the implementation of gendered health perspectives.

Misra et al. (2021) studied how the female population can be empowered in India by means of the decision-making process. The research highlights the fact that the involvement of women in the household, financial, and social decision-making processes will contribute greatly to their independence, self-esteem, and social standing in general. The authors argue that increased participation in decision-making enables women to have better control over the economic resources and opportunities, and hence the growth of their socio-economic lives. Another important issue that is identified by the research is that educational level, employment prospects, and encouraging family conditions contribute to the empowerment of the decision-making ability of women. The results indicate that women's empowerment by involving them in more decision-making should be central in ensuring the realization of gender equality and sustainable development (Misra et al., 2021).

Bates et al. (2004) included a review of socio-economic and gender inequality during climatic stress. The researchers concluded that it is important to deal with institutional inequalities in health, education, and social services in order to diminish health inequalities caused by climate change in women.

Hosseinneshad (2017) addressed the problem of the relationship between environmental degradation and gendered health disparities through an ecofeminist approach. Their results believe in combined policy intervention that would take into consideration ecological sustainability as well as the health requirements of women.

Gender and environmental equity policy recommendations were emphasized by OECD (2019), showing that climate governance requires gendered health experience and decision-making positions to ensure the absence of adaptation gaps.

Guidance on climate change and gendered health impacts has been published by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2024), where gender considerations are presented as a key element in improving adaptive capacity and equitable health outcomes, through the inclusion of gender considerations in health policies.

Hjelmskog et al. (2025) conducted a systematic review of the gaps in health policy in climate adaptation. They discovered that ignoring the experiences of women in terms of their health in the policy structures continues to expose them to vulnerabilities and curtails their effective adaptation.

### **Research Gap**

Although more research is being reported on gendered climatic vulnerabilities, few studies have incorporated women's lived-in health experiences into sustainable development and climate adaptation processes. The majority of the analysis is based on the environmental exposure or policy effectiveness, but does not cover the interaction of the women with the health systems, emergency care, and public health services. Besides, a few interdisciplinary solutions are provided in linking ecofeminism, medical sociology, and population health, which poses an urgent gap in evidence-based interventions to SDG 5 and SDG 13.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To examine how gendered social roles, caregiving responsibilities, and socio-cultural norms influence women's vulnerability to climate-related health risks.
2. To investigate the interplay between women's agency, decision-making capacity, and structural inequalities in climate adaptation and health service access.
3. To propose gender-responsive pathways that integrate women's health experiences into sustainable development and climate action policies.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do climate change and environmental degradation differentially impact women's health and wellbeing?
2. In what ways do structural inequalities and social roles limit women's agency in climate adaptation and healthcare decision-making?
3. What strategies can integrate women's lived experiences to enhance gender equity in sustainable development and health policy

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a qualitative integrative review of peer-reviewed literature and credible institutional reports that are pertinent to gender, climate change, health, and sustainable development, which have been used in this paper. They comprise open-access articles in interdisciplinary journals, reports of the United Nations, and policy documents of the world. The discussion is based on thematic synthesis to determine the trends in the vulnerabilities of women, agency, and policy implications of climate and health systems.

### **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

Social gender roles tend to place women at a higher risk whenever there are stressors of climate. To illustrate, women who are engaged in the household food provisioning and water collection are affected more by the droughts and water scarcity, which result in greater vulnerability to malnutrition, infection, and stressful disorders. According to the global stories, women and girls have much higher chances of having adverse health impacts after natural disasters, which is why the disaster risk reduction efforts should be gender responsive (UN Women, 2023). The low-resource environment contributes to the vulnerability of women to the effects of climate because socioeconomic factors prevent them from accessing healthcare services. Access to education, land ownership, and economic participation are also structural discriminations that further make women incapable of mobilising resources and lobbying for their health needs in their climate adaptation planning. According to the ecofeminist theory, women and nature are

exploited by patriarchal structures. Therefore, environmental destruction and gender inequality are processes that exist in bigger structures of domination. Gender climate perspective highlights a need to consider the systemic inequalities as the drivers of sustainable responses, but not environmental symptoms (Rainard et al., 2023).

Another aspect of eco-feminism is the role women play as the repository of traditional ecological knowledge. Their experiences in managing the natural resources used in their lives, including water harvesting, farming, and health practices in their communities, can be used to develop climate adaptation solutions based on the local context, and resilience and better health outcomes of the population. Although there are rising discourses of gender equality and climate action, the actual implementation of the policy is uneven. Most national plans of adaptation do not include gender disaggregated information and do not incorporate the issue of gender in the various sectors. According to the OECD, gender equality and environmental ambitions are mutually supportive, but the pace and inconsistency of gender incorporation into the process of environmental policy development are still low (OECD, 2021). Moreover, the climate policies do not take into account the health aspects and divide the environmental objectives and health services planning. This lack of connection highlights the importance of the integrated climate health governance that would tackle the gendered vulnerability and enhance the healthcare system, especially emergency response capacity.

### Implications and Sustainable Pathways of Policy

The promotion of climate and health policies that are gender-responsive must be done at large-scale levels that encompass ecological sustainability and social equity. This involves undertaking gender disaggregated climate risk and health impact analysis to inform specific interventions to ensure the vulnerabilities and experiences of women are well captured and dealt with. It is also important to have women in the climate governance and health policy forums, whereby their experience can directly influence the adaptation process and their views on the decisions made. The health system preparedness needs to include both gender equality (SDG 5) and climate action (SDG 13) because their implementation will strengthen resilience and create equal healthcare access which will benefit community health results. The health planning process needs to adopt an ecologically sustainable gender-responsive approach because it will improve community health resilience and reduce climate-related health disparities while supporting equitable sustainable development.

### CONCLUSION

The different effects which climate change and environmental degradation have on women show the presence of health and sustainability-related gender inequalities which exist in these areas. The ecofeminist viewpoint shows that societies need to implement transformative policies which will include women's contributions to climate adaptation and health governance their roles as decision-makers and their knowledge. The policies should transition from their current technocratic approach to achieve SDG 5 and SDG 13 because this change will reduce women's inherent weaknesses and strengths as change agents through equitable methods which recognize their true value.

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