



## Social Work and Human Rights in Disaster Relief: Advocating for Vulnerable Populations Post-Disaster: A case study of Pakistan

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### Abstract

Natural disaster prevalence and severity have been on the rise in Pakistan, yet, post-disaster recovery actions are still inadequately satisfying the human rights of the vulnerable groups. Current disaster response strategies are mostly geared towards short-term humanitarian aid, emergency relief instead of safeguarding and satisfying the basic rights like access to proper housing, health services, food security, inclusion and honor. The following objectives of this study are as follows: To investigate the degree to which social work practices during post-disaster relief and recovery in Pakistan integrate human rights principles. To examine advocacy functions of social workers preserving and advancing the rights of vulnerable groups of people affected by the disaster in Pakistan. To find out the institutional, policy level, and socio-cultural barriers that impede effective rights-based social work interventions in post-disaster settings. To recommend social work strategies that are human rights oriented and can be used to empower disaster relief and recovery efforts on vulnerable Pakistan citizens. The research design used in this study was a qualitative case study research design, in order to investigate the manner in which social work practices apply to the operationalization of human rights principles in the post disaster relief to the vulnerable members of the Pakistani population. The researcher was driven by an interpretivist research philosophy focusing on studying social reality based on the opinions and lived experiences of the participants. The study was carried out in some of the disaster-affected areas in Pakistan, especially in those areas which were affected by floods and other hazards caused by climate. The population of the study included social work practitioners, members of community who were impacted by the disaster, the local leaders, and the main stakeholders engaged in the process of post-disaster relief and recovery. Participants who were relevant to the study in their terms of knowledge and experience of post-disaster relief and social work advocacy were selected by use of a purposive sampling method. Interviews were semi-structured and focused group, where flexibility was provided, but the interviews adhered to the research question. Individual interviews in the form of semi-structured interviews that allowed in-depth examination of experiences, perceptions and advocacy of the participants, as well as the group discussion within the focus groups allowed the community members to reflect on participating in the community and protecting their rights. The thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data, according to the proposed framework. Informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and cultural sensitivity are some of the ethical principles that were highly adhered to during the study.

**Keywords:** Disaster Relief and Recovery, Advocacy and Community Empowerment, Human Rights-Based Social Work, Vulnerable Populations.

## Introduction

Natural or man-made disasters are a significant threat to human rights, and due to their disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations, they are already facing social, economic, and political marginalization. Disaster reduction and relief interventions based on the needs of people living in affected areas highlight the importance of considering the human rights principles within the framework of disaster risk management (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015; United Nations, 2015). In that regard, social work, because of its underlying belief in human dignity, social justice, and protecting vulnerable populations, is best placed to respond to such complex demands that become evident in post-disaster environments to go beyond the necessity of immediate relief all the way up to advocacy of systemic change and resiliency (Healy, 2009; McDonald et al., 2014). This paper looks at how the social work practice can work to operationalize human rights standards in disaster relief especially where the circumstances have been marked by long term socio-economic inequalities and institutional vulnerabilities. The geographical position of Pakistan and climatic diversity cause this country to be extremely vulnerable to various disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, and droughts, where frequent catastrophes significantly impact lives, livelihoods, and infrastructure (Ahmed et al., 2020; Shaw and Izumi, 2016). The floods in 2010 and 2022, e.g., demonstrated the existence of deep structural inequalities as the inhabitants with low income, women, children, and persons with disabilities were overrepresented by the catastrophe and faced numerous obstacles in accessing relief, rehabilitation, and recovery resources (Khan et al., 2023; Mustafa, 2013). These incidents help shed light on how the vulnerability of disasters meets the existing problems of poverty, fragile governance, and unequal access to services situations that exacerbate the threat to human rights and require interventions that are culturally sensitive. In such a complex socio-legal world, the social work interventions have to be able not only to solve the logistical issues in the post-disaster settings but also to champion equitable rights to shelter, health, education, as well as involvement in the recovery decision-making. Social work, in disasters, has not only the responsibility of providing direct service, but also rights-based advocacy, community mobilization, and policy participation. Social work disaster relief has a human rights framework that requires the identification of populations whose lives have been impacted by a disaster as right holders who deserve to be provided with dignified living conditions, protection against discrimination, and meaningful presence in disaster planning (Midgley and Livermore, 2009; Fannon et al., 2016). This view is especially relevant in Pakistan, where the socio-cultural background and various vulnerabilities are witnessed between provinces and population groups. Placing the topic of disaster relief within the context of wider social justice, environmental equity, and legal acknowledgement, this paper will inform how social work can help not only achieve immediate relief but also long-term empowerment and structural change on vulnerable communities in post-disaster Pakistan.

## Background of the Study

The country is extremely susceptible to natural disasters since geographical factors, climatic changes, and the socio-economic disparities, place Pakistan in a situation where disasters are a constant burden and their effects have severe human rights consequences. Empirical data underlines the fact that floods, earthquakes, and climate-related risks always affect people in Pakistan, disrupting their livelihood, displacing them, and compromising their access to the most basic of needs, including shelter, health, food security, and education (Mustafa, 2015; Kreft et al., 2016). Such disasters are not neutral in that they are not isolated phenomena, but they interact with structural inequalities that exist in the form of poverty, poor governance and unequal development to cause disproportionate damage on marginalized populations (Wisner et al., 2004). As a result, in Pakistan, the effects of disasters do not only focus on physical damage, but also on long-term social displacement, loss of dignity, and negation of basic human rights, and as such, rights-based disaster responses are required. The distribution of

vulnerability in the post-disaster situations is skewed, with females, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and households with low economic status having a high scale of vulnerability. Research on the subject of disaster vulnerability in South Asia shows that gender, class, and disability are greatly defining how people are exposed to hazards and recovery following impact of disasters (Enarson et al., 2018; Gaillard et al., 2019). In Pakistan, it has been found that the marginalized population tends to live in the areas subject to hazards and insufficient access to early warning and health services, as well as state support, which further increases the post-disaster pain and human rights abuse (Ahmed et al., 2016). Moreover, cultural expectations and lines of authority often inhibit women in their movement and involvement in relief decision making, and impairs their access to aid and efforts to enhance their susceptibility in the period of displacement and recovery (Ajibade et al., 2020). The presented results indicate that the notion of the need to combat social inequality and discrimination should be viewed as a core aspect of disaster relief and recovery. Social work is based on the principles of human rights, social justice, and empowers, and it provides a sharp approach to providing care to the vulnerable groups in disasters. The ethical role of social work in the international community is highlighted by the need to foster dignity, participation, and equity in the interventions during disasters, especially in the post-disaster contexts where power inequalities and failures of institutions are dominant (Healy, 2008; Dominelli, 2012). Within the Pakistani setting, researchers claim that the inclusion of social work in disaster management can make communities more involved, hold them more responsible, and make such relief activities meet the requirements of human rights (Shah et al., 2021). Social workers can be instrumental in providing immediate humanitarian aid and long-term recovery, promoting an inclusive governmental policy, and protecting the rights of the marginalized by adopting rights-based/community-based methods to address the disaster issue in Pakistan.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although the rate and severity of natural disasters in Pakistan are increasing, post-disaster relief still does not sufficiently meet the human rights of the vulnerable populations. The current disaster response system is biased towards short-term humanitarian aid, which is based on emergency relief instead of protection and provision of basic rights, including access to proper housing, health services, food security, involvement in and dignity (Wisner et al., 2004; Mustafa, 2015). Empirical literature proves that the effects of the disaster are socialized, and marginalized groups, especially women, children, persons with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged communities are especially vulnerable to losses and have a slow recovery because of institutional inequalities and poor support (Enarson et al., 2018; Gaillard et al., 2019). These vulnerabilities are also exacerbated by the fact that in Pakistan, such factors are supported by poor governance, political influence in providing aid, and inadequate accountability systems, leading to a continuous violation of rights at the stage of post-disaster recovery (Ahmed et al., 2016). Despite the fact that the profession of social work is based on the foundations of human rights, social justice and advocacy, the role of social work during disaster relief and recovery in Pakistan is not even developed and institutionalized. It has been shown that the disaster management systems frequently undermine the social work expertise increasing the likelihood of less community involvement, poor support of vulnerable populations during the advocacy process, and insufficient implementation of the rights-based approaches into the relief planning and execution (Dominelli, 2012; Healy, 2008). This disparity inhibits the ability of the disaster response systems to counter power disequilibrium, social marginalization, and immediate recovery demands of the impacted populations. Therefore, there is also an urgent requirement to investigate the ways in which human rights-driven social work practice can contribute to better advocacy, inclusion-focused participation, and protection of the rights of vulnerable groups in post-disaster situations in Pakistan. It is critical to address this issue in an attempt to enhance fair systems of disaster relief that are no longer limited to emergency response but rather to sustainable and rights-based recovery.

### **Research Questions:**

1. What is the inclusion of human rights principles in social work when providing post-disaster relief and recovery in Pakistan?
2. What do social workers do to promote the rights and protection of vulnerable groups during the post disaster situations in Pakistan?
3. Which structural, institutional and socio-cultural obstacles hamper the success of social work advocacy of rights in post-disaster relief, and how can they be overcome?

### **Research Objectives**

1. To examine the extent to which human rights principles are integrated into social work practices during post-disaster relief and recovery efforts in Pakistan.
2. To analyze the advocacy roles of social workers in protecting and promoting the rights of vulnerable populations affected by disasters in Pakistan.
3. To identify institutional, policy-level, and socio-cultural barriers that hinder effective rights-based social work interventions in post-disaster contexts.
4. To propose human rights-oriented social work strategies aimed at strengthening disaster relief and recovery mechanisms for vulnerable populations in Pakistan.

### **Conceptual Framework**

<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>Dependent Variable</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rights-Based Social Work Practice</li><li>• Advocacy and Case Management</li><li>• Institutional and Policy Support</li><li>• Community Participation and Empowerment</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Protection of Human Rights Post-Disaster</li><li>• Improved Outcomes for Vulnerable Populations</li></ul>

### **Conceptualization and Operationalization**

#### **Independent Variables**

**Rights-Based Social Work Practice:** An intervention to apply the principles of human rights, in particular, dignity, equality, participation, and non-discrimination, to disaster relief.

**Advocacy and Case Management:** The social workers advocate, referred to legal, and coordinate to assist the affected groups to access relief, protection, and service delivery.

**Institutional Infrastructure and Policy Support:** Accessibility of favorable disaster management policies, inter-agency, and institutional support of the rights-based interventions.

**Community Participation and Empowerment:** Engaging the affected communities, especially vulnerable groups, in the decision-making and planning process as well as recovery process.

#### **Dependent Variables**

**Protection of Human Rights Post-Disaster Human rights protection:** Human rights (like access to shelter, healthcare, food, safety, and legal protection) during and after disasters.

**Better Results and Interventions where Vulnerable Populations are concerned:** There should be better social protection, inclusion, resilience and recoveries amongst women, children, older adults, persons with disabilities and marginalized communities.

### **Literature Review**

Social work practice in a disaster has been progressively influenced by the human rights-based approach since it prioritizes the notions of dignity, equality, participation, and accountability.

Researchers contend that catastrophes enhance already existing social disparities, and rights-oriented interventions are necessary to safeguard the marginalized groups even in the relief and recovery processes (Dominelli, 2012; Ife, 2016). Social workers in a disaster context are placed to apply the abstract principles on human rights into real-life implementations where every person has an equal access to shelter, food, healthcare, and protection. Studies indicate that when human rights models are applied to disaster social work, the ethical practice would be enhanced and social justice upheld through mitigating both short-term humanitarian and structural gaps (Healy, 2008; Alston and Goodman, 2013). The environments that follow disasters have a disproportionate impact on the vulnerable population, such as women, children, the elderly, disabled individuals, and the economically disadvantaged. Research has shown that these groups are regularly under a risk of being displaced, exploited, and left out by aid distribution because of social, cultural, and institutional factors (Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon, and Davis, 2004). Socio-economic disparities, gender-related norms, and geographic disparities interplay to increase vulnerability in the face of the disaster in Pakistan and restrict access to relief and recovery resources (Mustafa, 2015). The literature on social work highlights the necessity of advocacy and inclusive approaches that would be tailored so that the disaster responses are not used to contribute to the already existing power inequalities (Peek and Stough, 2010). The role of social workers in the context of disaster relief is a complex one that includes: psychosocial assistance, case management, community mobilization and rights advocacy. Literature emphasizes that in addition to the emergency support, social workers play a decisive role in promoting the long-term recovery, particularly the livelihoods, the restoration of the social network, and the resiliency of the community (Mathbor, 2007; Dominelli, 2014). Social workers in post-disaster Pakistan tend to work between state, non-governmental, and impacted communities, which allows dealing with vulnerable populations through coordination and advocacy. Nevertheless, as it is also reported in literature, the lack of professional acknowledgment and inadequate preparation into disaster-specific human rights paradigms limit the power of social work intervention (Yanay & Benjamin, 2005).

Social work, especially in the area of disasters, has advocacy as a fundamental role, especially in overcoming systematic weaknesses in the delivery of relief and policy application. According to scholars, successful advocacy would include working on legal systems, changing policies, and raising the voices of the respective communities (Ife, 2016; Banks, 2012). The top-down nature of the response to the disaster policy has been criticized as the prevailing mode of operation in Pakistan, which excludes the participation of the locals and ignores the needs of the vulnerable populations (Mustafa & Wrathall, 2011). When based on the principles of human rights, social work advocacy may confront the weaknesses of the institutions and foster more inclusive and responsible disaster governance. The community involvement is a commonly accepted principle of sustainable disaster recovery. According to literature, the inclusion of the affected in the decision making process improves the relevance, legitimacy, and effectiveness of the relief and rehabilitation efforts (Chambers, 1997; Shaw and Okazaki, 2004). Community-based strategies have demonstrated possible power in enhancing local coping and collective resilience in aftermath of disasters in Pakistan (Halvorson and Hamilton, 2010). Social workers promote participation process through empowerment of the vulnerable groups by enabling them to express their needs, demand their rights, and be involved in the recovery planning process, thereby lowering dependency and enhancing a long-term inclusion process into society. Regardless of the potential, social work founded on the rights is greatly challenged by the disaster relief in Pakistan. Equitable service delivery is often sabotaged by institutional bottlenecks in the form of poor institutional coordination, resource scarcity, and politicisation of aid (Mustafa, 2015). There are also cultural rules and dominance structures that limit the involvement of women and minority groups in the recovery policies. Also, lack of systematic training on disaster social work and human rights curtails the ability of practitioners to promote their voices on behalf of vulnerable communities (Dominelli, 2014).

The above challenges identify the necessity to design context-sensitive frameworks that combine human rights principles and culturally informed social work practices and enhance post-disaster recovery efforts.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The research design used in this study based on the qualitative case study design was aimed at investigating the ways in which social work practices operationalize human rights principles in post-disaster relief to vulnerable populations in Pakistan. The analysis of complex social phenomena where meanings, experiences, and power relations are of central interest using a qualitative research design is suitable, especially in disaster situations that are predetermined by inequality and institutional restrictions (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The case study method will allow a profound analysis of the use of social work advocacy, community, and rights-based interventions in the context of real-life post-disaster situations where human rights understanding, negotiation, and implementation become apparent at the community level.

### **Research Approach**

The research was directed by the interpretivist research approach that focuses on comprehending social reality in the viewpoints and lived experiences of the participants. Interpretivism is especially applicable to social work studies which are concerned with human rights since they focus on subjective meanings, social contexts, and cultural dynamics but not on objective measurement per se (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). This is the method that enabled the researcher to encapsulate the perceptions of the social workers, community members and stakeholders towards human rights, vulnerability and advocacy in the settings of disaster recovery at Pakistan given that such perceptions are influenced by socio-cultural norms and institutional setups.

### **Study Area**

The study was carried out in some of the disaster affected areas in Pakistan, especially those, which had been affected by floods and other climate related dangers. The rationale behind these regions is that they have been affected by a series of calamities and have vulnerable communities who are constantly subjected to socio-economic and institutional marginalization. The geographic location of Pakistan is considered to be the disaster-prone, which, along with the issues in uneven development and governance, makes it a key area where the interrelation of disaster relief, social work practice, and human rights can be studied (Mustafa, 2015; Ahmed et al., 2020). The chosen locations offered good contextual backgrounds to examine the postdisaster advocacy and recovery efforts.

### **Study Population**

The target population included the social work practitioners, disaster-impacted community members, community leaders and important stakeholders in the disaster recovery and relief operations. The participants were chosen due to their immediate involvement in the areas of disaster response, human rights activism, and recovery efforts at the community level. Having different groups of stakeholders allowed triangulating the viewpoints and guaranteed the overall picture of the rights-based approach to social work practice and experience in post-disaster situations (Healy, 2008; Dominelli, 2014).

### **Sampling Technique**

The method of purposive sampling was used to choose the participants who possessed relevant knowledge and experience related to the post-disaster relief and social work advocacy. The qualitative research is commonly discussed as purposive sampling, as it helps to locate cases

with informational depth to gain profound understanding of the research problem (Patton, 2015). The study participants were chosen following the following criteria: participation in disaster response, experience with vulnerable populations, and knowledge of human rights-oriented interventions to make sure that the received data is relevant and comprehensive.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The data was gathered using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions where flexibility was given and the data was gathered according to the research questions. The semi-structured interviews were used to study the experiences of the participants, to perceive and advocate their roles, and focus group discussions helped to discuss the community inclusion and the rights protection within the community (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). These techniques were quite appropriate in the process of capturing narratives pertaining to vulnerability, institutional constraints, and social work interventions in the post-disaster environment.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

The thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected and it was done in accordance with the framework offered by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach consisted of systematic coding, data categorization and interpretation to establish common themes yes and no in the area of human rights integration, advocacy, vulnerability and institutional challenges. Thematic analysis was selected due to its flexibility and rigor, which enables the patterns to emerge inductively without disconnecting them to the human rights theory and social work.

### **Ethical Considerations**

During the research, ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation and cultural sensitivity were always adhered to. Since the populations affected by the disaster are vulnerable, special attention was paid to the fact that the participation would not be harmful or distressing and that the dignity and autonomy of the participants would be preserved. The qualitative research standards and social work ethics which focused on human rights and marginalized group protection have informed the ethical conduct (Israel & Hay, 2006).

### **Trustworthiness of the Study**

In order to ascertain the reliability of the qualitative reporting, the research used the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was boosted with the use of long-term involvement and validation of participants, whereas dependability and confirmability were reinforced with the help of a comprehensive methodological description. There was richness in the contextual description to facilitate transferability to other similar disaster and social work contexts, which enhanced the rigor and reliability of the study.

### **Data Analysis**

In this chapter, the results of the research expressed in the form of thematic analysis are presented with respect to the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis produced six broad themes, each backed by their own sub-themes, which are the way social work is applied to implement the principles of human rights in the context of post-disaster relief and recovery to vulnerable populations in Pakistan.

### **Theme 1: Human Rights Integration in Social Work Disaster Practice**

#### **Sub-themes:**

The results suggest that the social workers are increasingly approaching the disaster relief as a human rights issue that has prioritized dignity, equality, and non-discrimination in service

provision. Respondents reported making an attempt to make shelter, health care, food and protection accessible equally to marginalized communities. This intervention can be seen as the application of human rights-oriented social work values, which state that members of populations affected by disasters should be perceived as a rightful group of people, but not the passive consumers of aid (Healy, 2008; Dominelli, 2012). Nonetheless, the review also indicated that the accountability mechanisms are still weak, which restricts the protection of rights in a consistent manner with regard to post-disaster interventions.

## **Theme 2: Advocacy as a Core Function of Disaster Social Work**

### **Sub-themes:**

The theme of advocacy was also prominent, and social workers were also at the forefront to mediate between the communities affected by disasters and relief agencies. The participants emphasized their involvement in case advocacy, reporting on abuse of rights, and bargaining with the authorities to create equitable aid distribution. These results are consistent with the scholarly literature on social work that defines advocacy as a professional responsibility in an environment of power inequality and institutional exclusion (Ife, 2016; Banks, 2012). In Pakistan advocacy was the most important when it comes to curbing the bureaucracies and political influence to the extent of marginalizing vulnerable people whenever responding to disasters.

## **Theme 3: Socially Constructed Vulnerability in Post-Disaster Contexts**

### **Sub-themes:**

The discussion proves that the disaster vulnerability in Pakistan is highly entrenched within the social and structural inequalities. The women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, and economically marginalized communities were always reported to be at a greater risk in the process of displacement and recovery. This contributes to the theoretical approach of disasters not being such occurrences but being influenced by social, economic and political parameters (Wisner et al., 2004; Mustafa, 2015). Women mobility and decision-making are limited by cultural norms that further increase the issue of exclusion and violation of rights in post-disasters (Enarson et al., 2018).

## **Theme 4: Institutional and Policy Constraints on Rights-Based Relief**

### **Sub-themes:**

The barriers were also recognized as institutional and policy related as being a significant hindrance to successful response to disasters based on rights. According to the participants, there was a lack of coordination between agencies, transparency, and the inclusion of social work professionals in the disaster governance systems. These results are also similar to exposures of top-down disaster management models in Pakistan that are detrimental to participatory and rights-based strategies (Mustafa and Wrathall, 2011; Ahmed et al., 2016). The lack of official status of social work of disaster policy models limits the role of the profession in affecting equitable recovery results.

## **Theme 5: Community Participation and Empowerment in Recovery Processes**

### **Sub-themes:**

Participation of the community was found to be a very important but poorly actualized aspect of the recovery after disasters. The results point to the idea that in the situations when the impacted populations participate in planning and implementation, relief actions are more topical, comprehensive, and sustainable. This is in line with the participatory development and

disaster recovery literature that underlines the provisions of empowerment and ownership by the locals as sources of resilience (Chambers, 1997; Shaw and Okazaki, 2004). The social workers were identified to have a facilitative role in enhancing the voice of the community, especially in marginalized groups that were never involved in the decision-making process.

### **Theme 6: Toward Transformative and Rights-Centered Disaster Recovery**

#### **Sub-themes:**

The last theme underscores the transformational possibility of the rights-based social work in disaster situations. The respondents pointed out that sustainable recovery will only be attained by focusing on structural factors that contribute to vulnerability such as poverty, inequality and poor governance. This has been in line with the critical social work views that disaster responses should go beyond emergency response to systemic change and social justice (Dominelli, 2014; Alston and Goodman, 2013). The results indicate that human rights protection can be reinforced by a combination of advocacy and community empowerment with policy change progress and enhancing long-term outcomes of vulnerable populations in post-disaster Pakistan.

#### **Discussion**

This research confirms the conclusions of the previous one regarding the necessity to adopt a human rights-based approach to the social work practice to respond to the challenges of the unequal disaster effects in Pakistan. In line with the previous studies, the research paper indicates that the marginalized populations are disproportionately impacted by the disasters because of the structural inequalities that existed before, poor governance, and inaccessibility to resources (Wisner et al., 2004; Mustafa, 2015). The thematic analysis reveals that social workers are very instrumental in operationalization of human rights principles which include dignity, non-discrimination, participation, and accountability by promoting equal access to shelter, health, food security and protection. These conclusions are consistent with the global social work research, which underlines the idea that a disaster relief should not be limited to short-term humanitarian assistance but be rights-oriented intervention, which should consider the disaster-affected populations as subjects of rights and not as passive beneficiaries (Healy, 2008; Dominelli, 2012). Nonetheless, the article also indicates that institutional and policy obstacles, which hamper the preservation of rights, persist and resonate with the criticism of top-down disaster governance and fragmentation of coordination in Pakistan (Ahmed et al., 2016; Mustafa and Wrathall, 2011).

In addition, the research highlights advocacy and community involvement as the key factors that social work can play towards transformative post-disaster recovery. The results are consistent with the available literature that frames advocacy as a fundamental professional activity, which allows social workers to disrupt the patterns of exclusion, give voice to marginalized voices, and create accountability within disaster response systems (Ife, 2016; Banks, 2012). Community empowerment is also in line with participatory development and disaster recovery models that posit that sustainable recovery and resilience is achieved when there is a meaningful community participation in the decision-making processes (Chambers, 1997; Shaw and Okazaki, 2004). Social workers can aid in the reduction of the structural determinants of vulnerability, such as poverty, gender inequality, and social exclusion by assisting communities to participate and connecting short-term relief efforts with long-term recovery. These results can be added to the general discussion of disaster social work as it shows that the rights-based and advocacy-driven practice approach can change the post-disaster relief in Pakistan into a more inclusive, accountable and socially just process (Dominelli, 2014; Alston and Goodman, 2013).

## Conclusion

The research paper concludes that a human rights based approach should be combined in the practice of social work in order to have effective and equitable disaster relief and recovery in Pakistan. The results prove that disasters are not just environmental phenomena, but socially constructed ones that increase the existing inequalities of poverty, gender, disability, and governance failures. In line with the critical disaster scholarship, the analysis proves that disadvantaged communities suffer most and take a long time to recuperate because of structural weaknesses and marginalizing institutions (Wisner et al., 2004; Mustafa, 2015). The operationalization of the principles of dignity, non-discrimination, participation, and accountability makes social workers instrumental in the transfer of the human rights norms into practice through means of practical intervention to safeguard access to shelter, healthcare, food security and legal protection. Nevertheless, the inability to have strong coordination, politicization of aid, and institutional failure to value social work limits the achievement of rights based disaster responses in Pakistan (Ahmed et al., 2016; Dominelli, 2012). The paper goes further to note that advocacy and community involvement are the key to changing post-disaster relief into being more short-term humanitarian aid into a process of rights-based and sustainable recovery. The social workers advocacy, case management and community mobilization helps the marginalized groups to exercise their rights and oppose the exclusionary practices and be useful in the decision-making process of recovery. These results support the idea of participatory and empowerment-based approaches, which state that resilience and long-term recovery is enhanced when crisis-affected communities are perceived as agents, as opposed to a recipient of assistance (Chambers, 1997; Shaw and Okazaki, 2004). Through the connection of short-term relief with structural transformation, policy participation, and social justice, rights-based social work has a great prospect of viewing the underlying causes of disaster vulnerability in Pakistan. Finally, the research adds to the literature of disaster social work by showing that the approach that considers the inclusion of human rights, advocacy, and community empowerment into the disaster response system is pivotal in protecting vulnerable populations and promoting the cause of inclusive, accountable, and transformative post-disaster recovery (Ife, 2016; Alston and Goodman, 2013).

## Recommendations/Suggestions

- Make human rights-based framework part of national and provincial disaster management policies so that dignity, equity and non-discrimination are guaranteed in the relief and recovery efforts.
- Introduce the social worker position in disaster management authorities to enhance advocacy, case management, and protection of rights of the vulnerable groups.
- Offer practitioners with specialized disaster social work and human rights training to improve ethical and culturally responsive as well as rights-based interventions.
- Enhance local involvement systems to guarantee that women, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups of people make significant contributions towards post-disaster decision making.
- Create open systems of accountability and monitoring so as to limit politicization of aid and equitable distribution of relief aid.
- Facilitate the ability of government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and social work institutions to coordinate their efforts to provide integrated and rights-based responses to disasters.
- Consider women, children, old age and the disabled as very vulnerable populations and should be prioritized when considering targeted protection strategies to apply during recovery phases.
- Integrate advocacy and legal referral service into the disaster relief programs to deal with rights infringement and enhance the entitlement accessibility.

- Combine short-term humanitarian aid with long-term recovery planning in order to deal with structural vulnerability factors including poverty and social exclusion.
- Further research and policy assessment on rights-based social work practices is encouraged to inform evidence-based disaster governance changes in Pakistan.

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