

## Impact of Earthquakes on Women's Daily Life in Kathmandu

Saroj Pokharel<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lecturer, Active Academy College, Kathmandu, Nepal

\* Email: [pokharelsaroj44@gmail.com](mailto:pokharelsaroj44@gmail.com)

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#### Corresponding Author:

*Saroj Pokharel*

*Email:*

[pokharelsaroj44@gmail.com](mailto:pokharelsaroj44@gmail.com)

#### ORCID ID:

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-9336-423X>

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### Abstract

The natural phenomena of 2015 earthquake particularly affect in women daily routine and provide threat. As women were given responsibility of caretaker they face tremendous challenge in their living, protection, physical and mental health. Among various research approach descriptive method was used to take qualitative data from the women who had first experience of earthquake. Moreover, checklists were used in stability of data taken from ethnographic observation and interviews. During the earthquake of 2015 it causes destruction of homes forcing women in movement from one place to another with most of the time spending in temporary shelters. Women are main caregiver for family members, so they are facing depreciation of food and emotional stress. For responding such stressful situations different types of therapy, meditation and social mobilization in community play tremendous role. Although women have such type of difficulty during earthquake they were highly engaged in reformation of their home and society by taking strong decisions. During earthquake particularly the life of all inhabitants were affected but it turned women into their roles and responsibility. However, the problems such as absence of resources, physical and mental health problem and weak economy remain as it is. The wants of women must be taken as priority which not only handle the present scenario but also helps in future activities, making them more enthusiastic in their work and help in taking strong decision process for long term achievement.

*Keywords:* earthquake, injuries, problems, responsibility, women

### Introduction

Nepal is covered by the diversity of plants and animals but it is at threat to climate change producing natural calamities such as flood, earthquake, landslides. Particularly it is at rank of 4 globally in climate change, position of 11 in earthquake and thirtieth in flood problem which in turn causes loss of wealth, disturbance in daily life and others sectors which are strongly related to climate and its change (MoFE, 2018). According to the recent climate-change vulnerability and risk assessment report (MoFE, 2021b), Among 77 districts of Nepal 50 districts are highly at threat by the bad effect of climate change. Such type of threat not only result in damage of their wealth and causes mortality but it also has bad impact on economic aspect and physical structure (Dahal, 2015). During the destructive earthquake of 7.6 magnitude in 25th April 2015 making epicenter as Barpak of Gorkha which causes devastation of thousand lives and injury to several thousand forcing people to shift away from Kathmandu valley to rural area of Nepal (National Planning Commission, 2015). The Gorkha Earthquake on 25 April 2015, have bad impact on lot of sector and loss of life across almost all parts of the country. The post Disaster Needs Assessment (PSNA) find out 32 districts as earthquake affected. Importantly, earthquake affected districts are Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, Kavre, Okhaldhunga, Sindhuli and Makwanpur.

During earthquake the small children and women were victim of abuses such as privacy, mental stress and protection leading emotional stress (Desai and Mandal 2021; Treichel 2020). Zaidi and Fordham (2021) suggest that when women are involved in different kinds of disaster management activities such as Disaster risk reduction (DRR) program and in policy level for formulation of strong policies, they have significant impact on all sectors of change (Memon 2020). The devastating natural calamity, earthquake has hamper the life of low status people such as small children, Dalits, women and other minor groups.

### Figure 1

*Location Map of Nepal*



Note: <https://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/gorkha-earthquake-18-moderately-affected-districts>

## Objectives

- To examine the impact of the earthquake on women's daily lives in Kathmandu.
- To analyze the changes in women's daily lives following earthquakes in Kathmandu.

## Methodology

To collect required amount of information and data a widely used approach as descriptive method was chosen. For sampling purposive sample method was used to select required number of participants because the sample taken was qualitative and small in number. The people of local area who feel the experience of earthquake at the beginning were placed in area of selection. The information and data help in selection process which include interview and observational method. Moreover, research checklists help in maintaining stability and uniformity in all aspects of study.

## Results and Discussion

### Instant Impact of Earthquake

It determines whether the respondents position was either outside or inside. According to the responses from respondents, during the devastating natural calamities earthquake the highest number of respondents were inside their household whereas

some respondents were outside near to their household. A few number of people were engaged in managing livestock and farming, while other people were in an open place. Due to the problem of earthquake a few number of people remain out of stress but some left their locality due to severe stress. The inhabitants who were feeling frightened think that staying in same place will be secure than running towards other place. They thought that they will be in trouble by other houses if they run away to other area. During earthquake the responsibility of young children and elder people increases. Due to the effect of earthquake most of the people move from their original site and live in the field with their family members. One respondent voice "I am Sarita, and my family and I stayed in a temporary shelter for about one to two months because we were too scared to return to our damaged home. The structure of our house was badly affected, and the aftershocks kept happening, making it feel unsafe to go back. We didn't know if the house would hold up, so we had no choice but to stay in the shelter until we felt it was safe."

When there is incidence of earthquake daily food items and non-food items are distributed among people as a relief from the natural disaster. Although different items were distributed some people lack access to food and clothing but other different group solve the problem by meeting the demand of general public. During the devastating earthquake the majority of people show middle level of satisfaction while very few show little level of happiness. During the survey of distribution process of relief materials, a small number of people feel there was no discrimination, and some proportion of inhabitants were unknown about the discriminations. Although they are not happy with the situation such as of homeless and other activities they have to face such extreme situation. According to the responses from different respondents a large number of people lost their job and they were engaged in household activities but the people who were engaged in agriculture sector continued their business and perform daily labor and students perform their task.

### **Rehabilitation and Relocation**

From the policy sector the strategy used in coordinating with natural disaster was the coordination of NRA's with NGO's group and other civil society group and beginning of certain things by the organization (Government of Nepal, 2019). From the

survey of different respondents some house was completely destroyed by the earthquake, a few were significant damage and minority of household have little fracture with muddy house more in threat of earthquakes. For coping with such calamities temporary recovery methods were used for small damage. A story is added from such 5/6 stories of earthquake. During the survey of respondent only their real homes are selected neglecting rental wealth which are not necessary for maintaining and somehow if they were fixed it required low labor. According to report, most of the people are forced to live in temporary house due to lack of money in repairing households.

### **Knowledge about Reconstruction Program on Respondents**

For managing physical damages, the goal is set for construction of buildings which are damage and the government of Nepal established the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) on the 25th of December 2015, which is an administrative authority responsible for the construction of buildings after earthquake. In the month of April 2016, the NRA incorporate NGO activities guidelines (National Reconstruction Authority, 2016) that makes easy for NGOs to consider various construction activities and mind healing activities after earthquake. It focuses that the responders are conscious of reconstruction of physical and mental status after earthquake. Reconstruction programs are those programs that focuses on the development of society through different activities. According to the data of above figure large number of people were unconscious of construction programs after earthquake. Actually some respondents said that they even don't know the simple meaning of reconstruction programs. They are totally unaware of the subject matter. Primarily for a society to be better more importantly woman should be involved in all the participation of reconstructions but the women are not conscious about such issue. So program should be encouraging with more participation that encourage women for the development of their mental status. Although they have various needs but only present needs which are immediately required must be fulfilled. The large number of population stated that the immediate need is of their housing in which one- story housing can also be adjusted with neglecting long buildings. Some respondent's response that fresh water and sanitation are their fundamental needs though they will manage shelter somehow. When the

factors such as personal cleanliness and sources of water are lacking, tremendous health hazard may arise. A few respondents said that employment is their top priority among other areas which were lost by the earthquake. They said that if they were capable and oriented at their work they can perform other different activities for sustaining, like: 35-year-old Maya Shrestha (new name). After her marriage, she is currently living in home of Manamaiju. Her other family members as mother-in-law, father-in-law, and two small sons collaborate and become total member of five and was performing farming activities in the field during the devastating earthquake. During earthquake she run in hurry to provide safety for their family. During earthquake simple home which are made of brick and mud got tremendous. After the calamities earthquake, Maya and her family went to nearby education center for gaining education and spent only one month over there. She is now living with her family after having a short term shelter. By the effect of devastating earthquake Maya's husband lost his life and she is looking after their family by performing agricultural activities and other various works as labor in daily wage for meeting the demand of the family. She spends most of their time in taking care of the household members and house. Monthly income of \$20,000 is not sufficient to meet all the demands so she is forced to perform other activities.

### **Changes Taken Places in Everyday Life of Women after Earthquake**

During natural disaster all around the world, women have been found to be in threat. The main causes of this threat are unemployment, diminishing health status and socio- cultural factor that allow inhabitants for facing different uncertainty. Most of the times women are marginalized over men in controlling over the assets (Bradshaw and Fordham, 2013). The huge natural calamity earthquake that target the nation on April 15, 2015, had an impact on several thousands of people. A lot of people were severely affected by earthquake, some were disabled and thousands have lost lives whereas a large number of daily activities of people have transformed due to earthquake. During earthquake, majority of the people lost their shelter, and a few of them were away from their members and affect houses which are fragile and old made of mud. During the study there were all kinds of respondents as feeling weak, afraid, highly affected, scared, low problem and no problems at all. Moreover, before the disaster of earthquake all respondents were engaged in their activities as farming, daily household activities

and a very few proportion said that they were involved in daily wages and business. After the earthquake some of the people were involved in agricultural work and wages whereas no one was in business which is the greatest difference in scenario of before and after earthquake.

Their daily lives have changed as a result of it. The majority of women relies on agriculture as their primary source of income. After earthquake, they cannot perform farming practices because most of their valuable time were spend in reconstructing their houses. Before earthquake people store their food but due to the problem all seeds in their shelter were destroyed. After the earthquake, respondents experienced various issue in terms of their safety as sexual abuse, family conflict, unemployment, which is regarded as violence and threat feel by middle aged woman who is 38-year-old Anita Thapa (new name). Since her marriage, she is living in home of Manamaiju and when devastating natural calamity earthquake happened, she is living with his family members. After the earthquake her mother-in-law suffered from the serious problem of paralysis for four years. Particularly women had a house of good condition sufficient for their members but due to the effect of earthquake house gets broken badly into worst. She saw the damage of house in-front of her eye. For fulfilling the demands of their household she moved to other place and spent their one month at teaching institution. Due to the serious impact of earthquake her husband survives for nine months and had serious problem of illness and died whereas the effect is also seen in mother-in-law who also died 20 days after her husband. At present she is with her two offspring's who studied in grade twelve and eleven. After earthquake she is facing lot of difficulty and to provide better education she is making a sweater to earn some cash. She is facing tremendous difficulty after the death of her husband in fulfilling the needs of her children and quality education.

### **Problems and Challenges faced by women after earthquake**

Women are not getting their basic needs in the sector of housing, food and health. Though they are not getting security in their fundamental aspects (UN Women, 2023 and UNOCHA, 2023). Moreover, different social crime are seen in in case of women as harassment and sexual affect, have been reported since the start of the crisis (UN Women, 2023). In addition to the damage caused by the devastating earthquake

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they suffer the loss of homes and their closed which in turn make the mental status disturb. After there is incident of earthquake women are facing lot of difficulty in their lives. After the incidence of devastating earthquake, the daily food was lost for two to three days and they have no shelter to sleep. Due to the effect of earthquake little child of 2 years old and old people of 70 years old were in same shelter and the responsibility for women increases in case of food. Food was the most important thing to collect for their members which had to be gather from different sources.

In the same way, they moved into makeshift homes following the earthquake. They used the available old materials to make temporary constructions for their collapsed houses. In those houses, they are dealing with a variety of issues. Zinc sheet is used to build the majority of houses. It gets difficult to stay inside during the day these summer days. In fields where dangerous insects and snakes are present, some people have built houses. They are primarily afraid of it at night. Women also have severe issues with access to clean water and proper sanitation. To get water, they must travel a great distance from their homes. Some of them are unable to devote time for other activities because they must spend more time managing water. Water that is pure has thus become their most pressing need at this time.

The highest number of the women who live in those shelter are facing lot of problems. After the earthquake, the highest proportion of women lost their constant employment. To fulfill the daily lives of family members they are mandatory to work. A few number of women reported that they lack money to get higher education for their children. Both the men and women are not engaged in their works so they are facing the problem in sector of education for the offspring. At their homes where the husband is not earning money, wives have to take all needs of their members. After the death of their husband they have to fulfill their family needs and take responsibility strongly. Women face problem in both the purpose as care provider and food of family members. The majority of women who have their own businesses have lost their daily earning so they are spending their time in the house. Majority of female have undergone in pressure to handle family expenses but they have to handle daily expenses, construct their homes, and have to look after their offspring education. Women whose husband have no job are taking financial status without other support. The report also said that

the people whose business are continued they are also having low business. Certain senior women were rejected due to the effect of earthquake in their homes because they are residing alone due to their movement of their members to other location and cannot forget the connection with their home. Some female is afraid of working as they get frightened by the effect and showed less interest in their working

Some respondents did not make their home after their home was destroyed by the earthquake while some of them lived in rented house. The study also shows that some are living in their relative's house and some are living in leased land.

### **Problems after Earthquake**

The interview with the respondents shows that some persons were facing issues with shelter while a few were dealing with water and hygiene of their own, high expenditure, loss of children from educational institution, low salary, a few number of respondents losing their jobs, and a very small number of respondents living in bad housing. After the earthquake the sources of water are also diminishing and large population faced the problem of pure water so people have to go to long distance for the water. Another problem after the earthquake is of toilet where they built common toilet for all in nearby area.

After the earthquake, among various difficulties problem of health issue is also one which affect in their all parts of the body. Among men and women, women face the problem before the earthquake and they feel same problem after the earthquake. A very little population feel problem as allergy of skin after the earthquake. The large population are facing problem of fear of natural calamity though they have negative perceptions on them. Also some people have said that they have no fear of earthquakes it become a common thing with them. All the wealth are lost by the effect of earthquake so they have no any valuable things to loose. Some respondents also said that they were totally frightened by the disaster of earthquake and cannot forgot the horrible effect of it. The respondents said that they were in trauma and take several times to get rid of it. A large mass of respondents feels the issue of psychological aspect where they become depressed due to loss of wealth and their loved ones in earthquake which they will never forget.

During earthquake people are in dilemma for solving and coping with various

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types of problems but they use various methods for dealing with it. For coping with various difficulty they use methods such as meditation and yoga in the morning, psychological problems, being familiar with their friends and increasing social circle, being focused and busy at the work. For forgetting the incidence of earthquake some women get totally enrolled in their work which helps them to cope with it. Additionally, few women spend their time with close friend circle and share their feelings and emotions to cope with fear of earthquake. A small proportion of women engage in local level program for remedy from the bad effect of disaster, while other women practice yoga and meditation as a means for improving their cognitive ability. Women are engaging in other various programs to handle the situations and forget the bad effect of earthquake.

### **Positive Impacts after Earthquake**

After the earthquake a lot of positive impacts are seen. Different types of construction programs are seen including thirty-six house of a single person, management of pure water supply projects of NGO and construction of infrastructures and restrooms for the development of the society. In comparison to the gender, women have given the power of decision making which make them more strong in their roles and responsibility. According to the respondent's women can take strong decisions and a small proportion are strong enough to handle daily expenses and solving different family problems. The decision taking capacity rise rapidly after the earthquake. To exemplify, the highest population of respondents were give strong decisions about their day to day expenditure whereas a smaller proportions of respondents give decisions about their learning of children and a smaller percentage of respondents say about economy, and eventually a small proportion were feeling worry about the location of their housing. During the case of earthquake, the greater part of responders were those who feel strong to make decisions for their closed ones; some of them were engaged in every development of the society while still others were those who take information about earthquakes, to exemplify Bina Shrestha, a 70-year-old woman who has lived with Manamaiju for a long period of time, is an individual who is like pseudo changed person who is living with her offspring's as a daughter and two sons where all are married. She was living in Manamaiju with her son and grandchildren and had visit to

nearest temple with her friends on April 25, 2015. When there is incidence of unforeseen disaster as earthquake in the afternoon, she became scared and worry about the safety of individual and their kids.

After arriving lately in home Bina realize that her granddaughter was not in home and she was lost after going to friend home. Entire community and the family members searched for his presence but they did not found and report to the police. After six-day inspection of police the granddaughter as found dead. The condition of the family was worst after the death of granddaughter. After hearing such bad news her two sons leave the Kathmandu valley and sheltered alone in their home. Bina refuse in leaving her old husband's home so their sons care her in an interval of time. Bina finds it difficult to manage her daily expenses because she cannot earn to get money.

### **Conclusion**

The short and long term life of women was totally changed by the devastating earthquake. According to the report women feel various interruptions in their daily lives affecting their mental ability, security and their livelihood. For surviving in such a terrible situation of fear and loss new methods for surviving are learn by women.

Due to the effect of earthquake the problem of home, source of water and medical facility have lot of effect in young children and old family members. More than this, earthquake also bought some benefit other than difficulty where bolder and confident in decision making. By engaging in such earthquake relief program individual were socially involved in different types of encouraging programs.

Such type of transformation in gender roles carry out different sectors for women in encouraging construction of society. Also, the highest population of women still face tremendous difficulties with cognitive health, economic situation and problem of resources. Their healing mechanisms, such as yoga, meditation, different types of therapy, and socialization among community, indicate the significance of society and mental support in hazardous disaster healing. Going forward, it is said that different types of plans and policies and programs place a wider role on wants of women, providing infrastructures such as sources, schooling and chance to reconstruct life in viable manner. Awareness on devastating disaster and involving of women in decision

criteria will be the solution in addressing future disaster and efforts.

**Short Recommendation and Future Research:** It is recommended that post-earthquake recovery programs must focus on needs and wants of female encouraging cognitive status of health, stability of finances and other sources. National level plan and policies should incorporate women in decision taking things and ensure their active involvement in remaking of efforts. Moreover, promoting of women in preparing for disaster, academic sector and society helps women to sustain in the society.

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