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Gender and Disaster: A Synthesis of Flood Research in Bangladesh

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4

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the wide body of literature on disasters and their impacts, there has been a persistent "gender silence" in disaster work (Bhatt 1995:3; Enarson and Fordham 2001; Fothergill 1998). Bolin, Jackson, and Crist (1998: 29) argue, "the voice of women is indeed the most noticeable absence in the literature." This gender silence is systemic as it is very evident within the larger political arena and social structure. As Siddiqui (2001: 1A) states "still they [women] are subjects of discrimination in every day life and cannot achieve minimum humane respect from the male-dominated social systems." Gender is a critical variable that researchers have too often ignored. A gender-neutral stance is frequently taken in disaster research which causes the differential impacts and experiences of disasters to be overlooked and men's experience is considered to be representative (Fordham 1998). Furthermore, the research community has only recently admitted that "exposure to risk of disaster is shaped by overarching social structures of caste and class, race and ethnicity, age and physical ability, and sex and gender" (Enarson and Morrow 1998:2). We must acknowledge that

99