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Research Article

Conflict, Displacement, and Gender: Human Security of Women in Assam

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ABSTRACT

The study targets to depict Women's human security is greatly impacted by "conflict and displacement" in Assam, which increases their insecurity and vulnerability in a number of ways. In addition to economic challenges, restricted access to resources, and psychological suffering brought on by displacement and loss of livelihood, women are more likely to endure violence, including sexual abuse. Armed strife and violence have plagued the region under the "Bodoland Territorial Council" BTC.This study utilises a qualitative research method, utilising secondary data and conducting a thematic analysis to explore the human security of displaced women in conflict-affected regions of Assam.

Keywords: Human rights, displaced communities, Assam women, Socio-economic, psychological challenges, economic difficulties and Human security, conflict, Gender.

INTRODUCTION

The North East states of Assam witnessed prolonged communal, political and ethnic conflicts, which further led to human insecurity and widespread displacement. Aiming affected, women are the most vulnerable demographic, they face challenges to socio-economic stability, access to resources and concerns about safety. The intersection of gender and conflict-induced displacement raises critical concerns about women's human security, which is often overlooked in mainstream discourse (Krause and Segadlo, 2021). Due to their mobility, men were also able to visit areas where significant decisions were being made, particularly regarding government support. However, this study seeks to analyse how ongoing conflicts have reshaped the lives of the displaced women in Assam, analysing their lived experiences by a gendered lens and identifying systemic gaps in policy and support structures to ensure their empowerment and protection.

Aim

The purpose of the research is to examine the impact of conflict-induced displacement on the human security of women in Assam through a gender-sensitive framework.

Research Objective

- To evaluate the nature and causes of conflict and displacement in Assam and how these affect women specifically.
- To explore the socio-economic and psychological challenges faced by displaced women in conflict-affected regions.
- To assess the existing governmental and non-governmental responses addressing the human security needs of displaced women in Assam.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The intersection of conflict, displacement, and gender has been explored extensively in global human security literature, highlighting that conflict disproportionately affects women. One such area where migration-related conflicts have led to widespread violence and the eviction of indigenous populations during the past 40 years is the state of Assam in North-

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East India, which is located at the centre of the Eastern South Asia regional model (Chakrabarti *et al.* 2021). Not only have political difficulties been a major factor in causing these conflicts, but during the past three decades, individuals of indigenous communities have been internally displaced to newer places due to a systemic pattern of land alienation brought on by catastrophic events. For instance, Assamese people have been especially at risk from the issues of flooding and erosion, which have resulted in significant land and life loss.

The underlying structural and conceptual obstacles which women encounter at the time of disaster recovery are concealed by frequent associations between gender, poverty and inequality and, consequently, vulnerability. Using empirical data from Assam, this study expands on previous conceptual discussions on empowerment and participation, primarily along the dimensions of mobility, resource control, active decision-making, and self-esteem (Vijayalakshmi *et al.* 2021). While displacement is frequently documented for numbers and location, the lived experiences of women are documented through the use of a gendered lens. This study focuses on filling that gap through examining how conflict-induced displacement influences Assam women's human security, considering both socio-cultural and structural dimensions.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilises a qualitative research method, utilising ***secondary data*** and conducting a ***thematic analysis*** to explore the human security of displaced women in conflict-affected regions of Assam. Relevant literature, like academic journals, news articles, government reports and policy documents, has been reviewed to develop a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Further more, the study has been consistent in using an ***"interpretivistresearchphilosophy"*** to emphasise that women are the most vulnerable demographic, facing challenges to socio-economic stability, access to resources, and safety concerns. Interpretivism philosophy embraces producing the information with a high level of validity through focusing on the motivation and personal meaning, and its remarkable flexibility for adopting new methods helps the study to depict with a more critical manner (Dewi *et al.* 2021). An ***"abductive research approach"*** has been conducted throughout the study as the intersection of conflict, displacement, and gender has been explored extensively in global human security literature, highlighting that conflict disproportionately affects women. The ***"research design is exploratory"*** has been followed within the study as it helps the researcher in defining the research problems and focusing on the understanding.

RESULT

Thematic Coding

Table 1: Thematic Coding

Theme No.	Theme	Description	Sample Codes
1.	Effects of conflict and displacement on Assam women in terms of human security.	Create a human rights-based strategy that protects the rights of displaced communities, especially those of underrepresented groups like women, indigenous peoples, and those with lower incomes (Chaudhury and Ghosh, 2021).	Human rights, displaced communities, Assam women.
2.	Socio-economic and psychological challenges faced by displaced women in Assam.	In Assam, displaced women deal with a wide range of interrelated psychological and socioeconomic issues. These include loss of livelihoods, economic difficulties brought on by displacement, heightened susceptibility to exploitation and violence, and serious effects on mental health (Chaudhury and Ghosh, 2021).	Socio-economic, psychological challenges, displaced women, economic difficulties, susceptibility, exploitation and violence.

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Theme No.	Theme	Description	Sample Codes
3.	Governmental and non-governmental responses towards displaced women in Assam.	The recruitment of displaced women is being addressed by Assamese government and non-governmental organizations, with an emphasis on supporting their economic empowerment (Lungbila and Joseph, 2021).	Governmental and non-governmental, economic empowerment.

Thematic Analysis

Theme 1: Effects of conflict and displacement on Assam women in terms of human security

Women's human security is greatly impacted by "conflict and displacement" in Assam, which increases their insecurity and vulnerability in a number of ways (Sinha *et al.* 2021). In addition to economic challenges, restricted access to resources, and psychological suffering brought on by displacement and loss of livelihood, women are more likely to endure violence, including sexual abuse. Armed strife and violence have plagued the region under the "Bodoland Territorial Council" BTC. The common people have suffered greatly as a result of the fight, both physically and mentally. In this context, security will be interpreted from the standpoint of non-traditional security, that is, security against non-traditional risks, such as economic inequality, political repression, poverty, unemployment, and personal security. Although men are equally at risk in armed conflict, women and children are likely the ones who suffer the most. Women in these wars suffer a number of security risks.

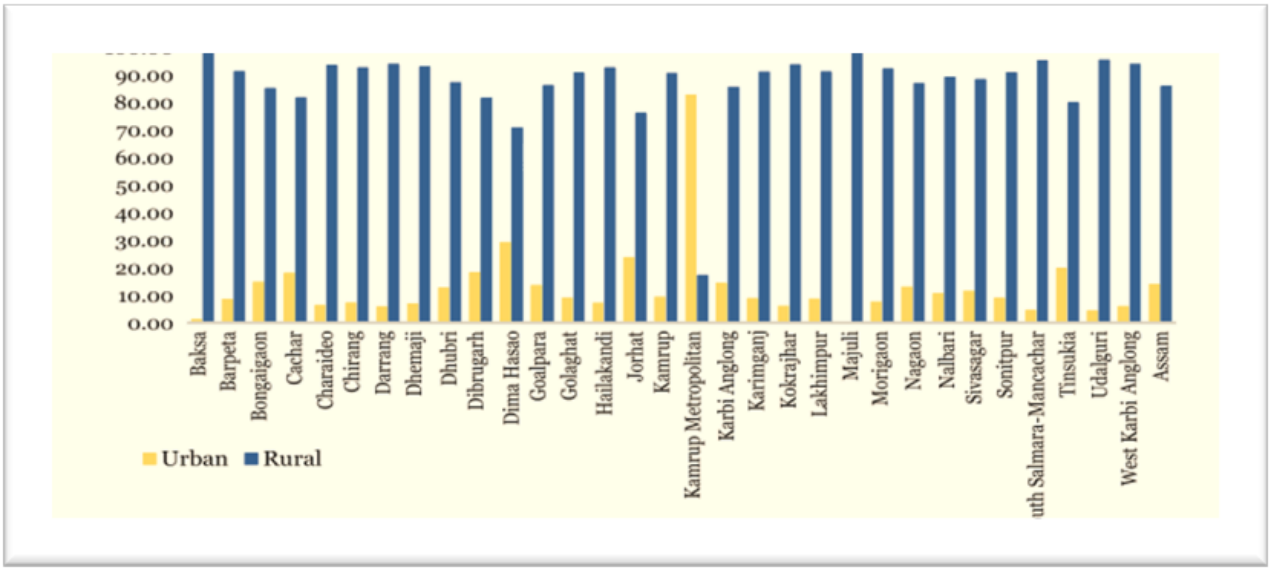


Figure 1: Assam's 2011 Urbanand Rural Population Distribution

(Source: Haq *et al.* 2021)

As to the 2011 "Census of India", there were 312.05 lakh people living in the Assam, with 159.39 lakh men and also 152.66 lakh women (Haq *et al.* 2021). According to the "2011 Census", just 14% of the state's population lives in urban areas, with 86% of people living in rural areas. The proportion of people living in rural areas exceeds the 69 percent national average for India.Typically, women are the objects of oppression and repression, frequently becoming the victims of sexual harassment, trafficking, abuse, and neglect. Such threats or acts of violence can originate from the government, gangs, rebels, private citizens, etc.

Theme 2: Socio-economic and psychological challenges faced by displaced women in Assam

Since its inception in the 1980s, the movement has gone through several stages of discussions, agreements, and disputes. The "Bodo Accord" signing in January 2020, which resulted in the establishment of the "Bodoland Territorial Region"

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(BTR) within Assam, was one of the movement's significant milestones. The agreement-maintained Assam's territorial integrity while addressing the aspirations of the Bodo population. Additionally, it gave the Bodoland region more socioeconomic development and political representation. Given the state's history of a social movement centered on citizenship status and the signing of the Assam Accord on "August 13, 1985", the definition of Assamese has been a point of debate (Chatterji *et al.* 2021). The question of who is "Assamese" has also been discussed by numerous "commissions and committees" over the years. Accordingly, the proposed definition of Assamese encompasses Indigenous communities, tribal people, and all other citizens and their descendants who can demonstrate that they or their ancestors lived in Assam on or before "January 1, 1951", in accordance with the "Ministry of Home Affairs'" (MHA) high-level committee's recommendation to implement Clause 6 of the Assam Accord.

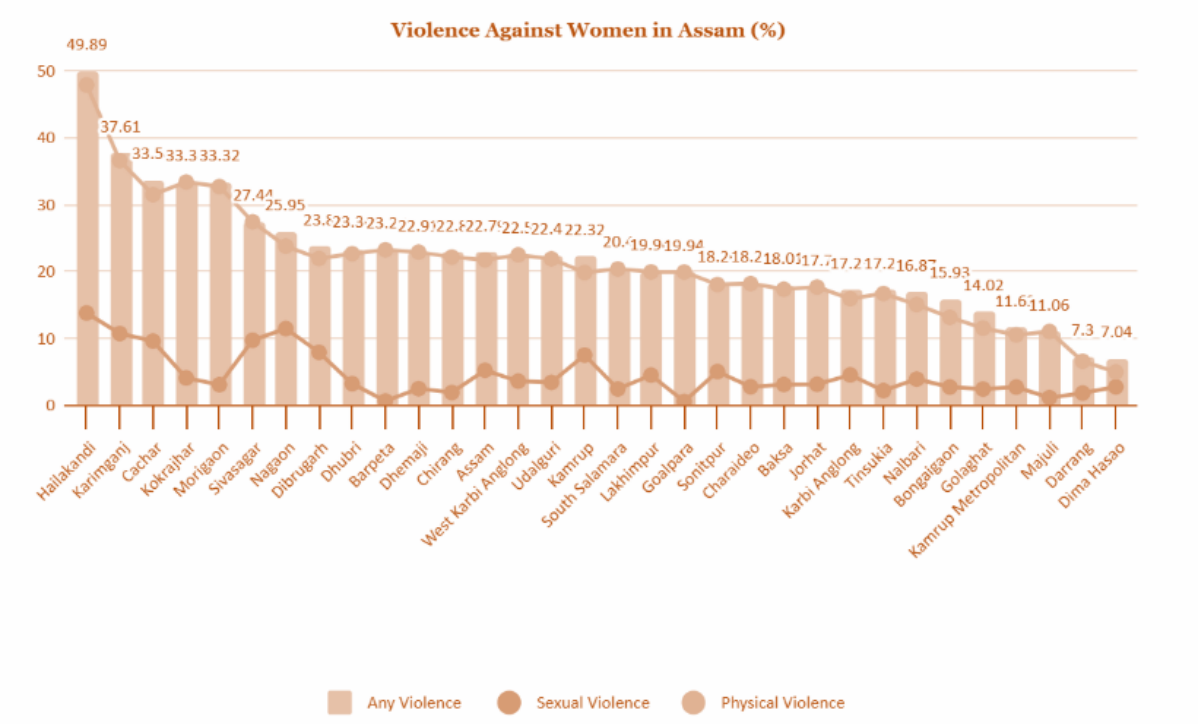


Figure 2: The percentage of violence against women in Assam by district

(Source: Lashkar, 2021)

The "National Family Health Survey" (NFHS), "(2019–2021) statistics" also include data on various indicators of violence against women in comparison to the NCRB data's reported crime rate (Lashkar, 2021). The percentage of physical and sexual violence against women in Assamese areas is highlighted in the above figure "National Crime Records Bureau" (NCRB) and NFHS differ in that the former measures reported crime against women, while the latter measures actual crime against women. This suggests that districts with higher reports and lower crime against women have better law and order and female empowerment.

Theme 3: Governmental and non-governmental responses towards displaced women in Assam

The needs of displaced women are being addressed by Assamese government and non-governmental organizations, with an emphasis on supporting their economic empowerment, health, and basic necessities (Lungbila and Joseph, 2021). They primarily reside in the western region of Assam, which currently includes Bodoland. "Bodoland Territorial Area District" (BTAD) was the previous name of this territorial region. The issues and requirements selected by the Assamese women varied from one another. Numerous organizations for women were established to continue their ethnic agenda and their community's progress. Therefore, an essential paradigm for researching these women's organizations is intersectionality. By recognizing how various experiences and viewpoints converge within those who consider themselves activists, intersectionality provides language to the values of justice and equality.

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The leaders of the Assam Movement, a "six-year-long" struggle against the illegal immigration in Assam, and the Indian government signed the Assam Accord in 1985. The agreement sought to solve the problem of unauthorized immigration in Assam, mostly from Bangladesh. The Assam Accord's main features include the identifying and expelling undocumented immigrants, denying voting rights to individuals who arrived in Assam after a certain date, and protecting the Assamese people's language and culture. In order to identify true Indian citizens and weed out illegal immigrants, the agreement also resulted in the establishment of the "National Register of Citizens" (NRC) in Assam. Women's organizations have proliferated in Assam since 1970, and the 1990s saw the start of the state's non-governmental organizations becoming more professional (Bhatia, 2021). These organizations not only advocated for women's rights but also brought attention to issues from a right-based opinion opposing various crimes committed against women. Women's professionalization in the NGO sector has started to grow as a result of professional non-governmental organizations providing opportunities for women to find employment.

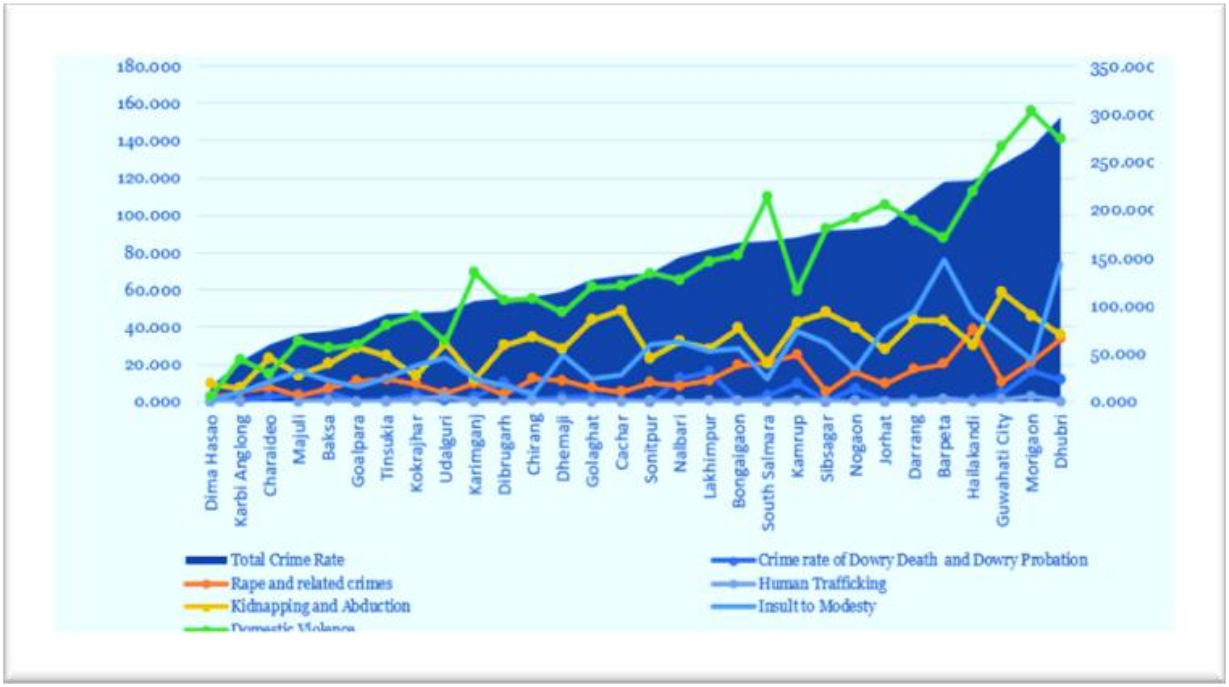


Figure 3: Assam's Crime Rate by District for Crime Against Women

(Source: Maity and Roy, 2021)

The number unequivocally demonstrates that the majority of crimes against women in the state are related towards domestic violence. Dhubri district has the most recorded crimes against the women overall, followed by Morigaon and Guwahati city, according to "NCRB data for 2021". Thus, Morigaon district has significantly consists with the highest rate of the domestic violence, followed by the Dhubri (Maity and Roy, 2021). A higher prevalence of domestic violence may be a sign of the women's empowerment because the NCRB have only includes reported offenses against women.

DISCUSSION

The approach on global human security has examined the relationship between gender, displacement, and war in great detail, emphasizing how women are disproportionately impacted by conflict. The relationship between gender and displacement brought on by conflict poses important questions regarding the human security of women, which are frequently disregarded in popular discourse. Men's mobility also allowed them to travel to places where important choices were being taken, especially those involving government assistance. Many communities with a variety of cultures, religions, and languages call the state of Assam home. Assam's largest plains tribe is the Bodo's. The "language, religion, culture, and identity" of the Bodos are all unique.

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CONCLUSION

Global human security has examined the relationship between gender, displacement, and war in great detail, emphasizing how women are disproportionately impacted by conflict. These disputes have been largely caused by political issues, but over the past thirty years, members of indigenous communities have also been internally moved to new locations as a result of a systemic pattern of land alienation brought on by catastrophic events. Assamese people, for example, have been particularly vulnerable to the problems of erosion and flooding, which have caused a large loss of land and lives.

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