Panel ABSTRACT

Panel 04: Intersecting frontiers: towards understanding intersections among climate change, culture, gender, and health in the Anthropocene

Organizer: Sadiq Bhanbhro, Inayat Ali

Abstract: Climate change causes extreme weather events that exacerbate health, food, and nutritional vulnerabilities worldwide, particularly in low-resource countries. These testing events make vulnerable populations, e.g., women, more vulnerable. Women, especially those who are pregnant or giving birth, disproportionately bear the consequences of climatic challenges, making maternal health a critical issue at the nexus of environmental, sociocultural, and economic factors. These vulnerabilities are not simply healthcare challenges but reflect deeper power imbalances, sociocultural norms, and systemic inequities.

The intersections between nature and culture become particularly significant when considering the ways gender dynamics, social class, and sociocultural patterns synergistically affect women's ability to access, use, and manage their health and well-being. These multifaceted challenges, such as inequities and climate change, raise pressing questions about how to address them effectively.

Despite global commitments to improve women's health through SDGs, progress remains insufficient in low-resource countries. Research that casts a critical light on the intersectional influences of climate change, sociocultural practices, and health needs to be discussed to inform impactful, community-driven interventions that enhance the health and well-being of vulnerable populations, especially women.

This panel invites proposals that use qualitative, ethnographic and community-based methodologies to show the "syndemic" (Singer, 1994) or synergistic relationship among sociocultural practices, economic contexts, climate-related events and women's health outcomes. We invite contributions that enhance our understanding of women's vulnerabilities and sustainable solutions for their health and well-being. Our panel aims to foster discussions among researchers, practitioners, and community members to address the disproportionate impact on women's health.

SESSION SCHEDULE

17.09.2025 | Slot 2 & 3| 2-0-1

Ana Cerezuela, Anna Molas, Helena Montasell: Making future in a changing climate: Maternal experiences of environmental risk and strategies for sustaining life in Barcelona

Farzana Habib: Syndemics of Food Insecurity, Mental illness, Tobacco use and Gender: Exploring the vulnerability of slum women in Dhaka City, Bangladesh

Eswarappa Kasi, Ananya Acherjee: Health Emergency of Gond and Panika Women during the Pandemic: An Empirical Study from Anuppur District of Madhya Pradesh, Central India

Isabelle Lange, Ijeoma Solarin, Veronika Tirado, Fortunate Machingura: Heat, risk, and gendered agency: Technocratic responses to climate change and the politics of maternal health

Young Su Park: Gendered Vulnerabilities of Female-Headed Households and Health Impact of Climate Crisis in Kiribati

Isabella M. Radhuber: Health Under Climate Pressure: An Emerging Research Agenda

Megan Schmidt-Sane, Paul Isolo Mukwaya, Alice Sverdlik, Hakimu Sseviiri, Peter Kasaija: Climate change, informality, and sexual and reproductive health: An emergent "syndemic" in Kampala, Uganda

SESSION PAPERS

Making future in a changing climate: Maternal experiences of environmental risk and strategies for sustaining life in Barcelona

Ana Cerezuela, Anna Molas, Helena Montasell

The effects of climate change and pollution on reproductive, maternal, and child health are growing concerns, particularly in urban areas that host most of the world's population. While these issues are gaining attention in public health research and mainstream media, there is a scarcity of knowledge on women's everyday experiences and strategies in navigating these already tangible challenges. We explore how the urban environment of Barcelona, with its specific situated challenges, shapes the temporally embedded experiences and responsibilities of pregnant and lactating individuals living in the city. Through an analysis of in-depth semi-structured interviews with 35 women, we examine how they perceive their environment, their own and their children's health and wellbeing, as well as their strategies to mitigate the perceived risks. The findings reveal that the concept of the city's environment is broad, encompassing gender, socioeconomic, urban, and even tourism-related constraints that are inextricably linked with pollution and climate

change. We also highlight how social and economic inequalities influence women's concerns and strategies in the face of environmental risks, emphasizing the importance of a focus on environmental reproductive justice. Finally, we challenge the concept of "environmental anxieties" and instead opt for a frame that recognizes that women's environmental concerns are usually deeply rooted in tangible present experiences rather than abstract, distant projections.

Syndemics of Food Insecurity, Mental illness, Tobacco use and Gender: Exploring the vulnerability of slum women in Dhaka City, Bangladesh

Farzana Habib

Women in low- and middle-income countries frequently encounter disparities, which exacerbate various health issues. Prevalence of smokeless tobacco use is notably high among rural women in Bangladesh. Experiences of food insecurity and the associated precarious living conditions lead to numerous tensions among women, resulting in tobacco use. Many women residing in slums of Dhaka City live under significant vulnerability due to the uncertainty of food consumption. Such precarious circumstances heighten anxiety and depression, leading to increased tobacco consumption. No prior study has examined tobacco consumption among women through the lens of the syndemics. This study elucidates the interconnected epidemics of tobacco use among women in the slums of Dhaka City, Bangladesh. Women in these slums lead lives marked by significant affliction due to economic insufficiency. Their financial constraints result in unmet food demands. Due to caregiving responsibilities, they prioritize feeding their children and elderly individuals over consuming nutritious food themselves. The lack of affordability and food insecurity contribute to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, prompting them to resort to tobacco consumption as a means of addressing their mental health challenges. This study highlights how structural violence, gender-specific roles, and psychosocial stress intersect to create a syndemic environment where tobacco use emerges as both a symptom and a survival tactic. By placing tobacco use within the broader context of social and economic determinants, this research emphasizes the pressing need for comprehensive, context-aware public health strategies that address both the root causes and effects of syndemic vulnerability.

Health Emergency of Gond and Panika Women during the Pandemic: An Empirical Study from Anuppur District of Madhya Pradesh, Central India

Eswarappa Kasi, Ananya Acherjee

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the entire social arena has greatly suffered, and women and older people have been significantly affected. Tribal women were not an exception to this phenomenon, and in fact, are in a more vulnerable condition in comparison to other social groups. During the crisis, tribal women had no source of income because they worked in informal and unorganized sectors. The sectors are based on market orientation. Due to social distancing and other regulatory conditions implemented, they needed more income for sustenance and livelihood. Tribal women reported more infections during the pandemic due to the emigration of their family members from nearby towns and cities. Furthermore, tribal women faced more familial violence due to the lockdown, which may have directly affected their livelihoods. Extra-marital relationships

also increased during this period, as mentioned by one of the respondents from the study area. This paper investigates how the local primary health centers dispensed their services during the pandemic. There are different Government healthcare schemes, run by both state and center, such as Pradhan Mantri Swastho Surakkha Yojna, which cater to the health needs of the people. This paper aims to discover whether these schemes are aware of ASHA workers of PHCs, which would aid them in dispensing their services to the people. The paper attempts to find various seasonal ailments and how they have been addressed at these health centers during the pandemic. This paper intends to investigate the nature and manner of precautions tribal women followed during this period.

Heat, risk, and gendered agency: Technocratic responses to climate change and the politics of maternal health

Isabelle Lange, Ijeoma Solarin, Veronika Tirado, Fortunate Machingura

As the climate crisis intensifies, extreme heat poses growing risks to maternal health—risks that are shaped by sociocultural norms and infrastructural inequities surrounding care, work, responsibility, and agency. This paper draws on ethnographic research conducted in South Africa, Sweden and Zimbabwe (2023–2025) to examine how women experience and respond to heat during the pregnancy and postpartum periods. This was formative work contributing to the development of guidance messages for a new heat-health early warning app. Using qualitative methods including photovoice, transect walks, and in-depth interviews, the study engaged over 70 women to explore embodied experiences of heat, local adaptation strategies, and social and material constraints shaping their responses.

We examine how women's adaptations are constrained by both structural conditions (e.g., housing, water access, and work) and shifting epistemologies of climate risk. Simultaneously, we analyze the introduction of the app as a technocratic intervention designed to help women “adapt.” Our analysis explores how subjectivities are shaped at the intersection of climate adaptation and reproductive vulnerability, showing how women are responsibilized as adaptive, risk-managing subjects within a global health framework, even as structural supports remain limited.

The inclusion of Sweden offers a comparative perspective: a setting where climate risks are still largely anticipatory, yet the framing of maternal vulnerability is already being shaped by global discourses. By analyzing the intersection of gender, climate, and health technologies, this paper contributes to understanding the lived dimensions of adaptation and the politics of who is expected to care, cope, and respond in the Anthropocene.

Gendered Vulnerabilities of Female-Headed Households and Health Impact of Climate Crisis in Kiribati

Young Su Park

An ethnographic study was conducted to understand how outer islanders in Kiribati perceive climate change risks and their health impacts as well as what are culturally acceptable climate resilience-building options for health. I- Kiribati women suffer from

the triple burden of communicable diseases, non-communicable diseases, and their concomitant exacerbation by climate crisis. Health issues of women related to climate change are heat stress, waterborne diseases, and noncommunicable diseases, including uncontrolled diabetes and hypertension from consumption of imported food and beauty standards. This field investigation identified four vulnerable groups affected by the impact of climate crisis that need focused interventions and support: 1) female-headed households 2) household of people living with disabilities 3) households at the oceanfront facing geographic vulnerability, and 4) traditional houses prone to extreme weather events. Households without an able-bodied male have limited access to water, coconuts, and fish. A household headed by an unmarried woman with children or a household with an elderly female and school-aged children faces difficulties in fetching water from distant wells or communal rainwater tanks. Female-headed households depend upon fish donated by neighbours due to the nature of fishing labour as a joint male venture. Since copra is the most important source of income, they have to collect fallen coconuts due to a lack of physical strength required for climbing coconut trees. Social network of women and their communal gathering is instrumental for water sharing and collective labor of weaving traditional mats and pandanus tree roof for income generation and climate mobility.

Health Under Climate Pressure: An Emerging Research Agenda

Isabella M. Radhuber

As the health effects of climate change are increasingly apparent, the shortfalls of narrow biomedical understandings of health are becoming even more apparent. In this paper I discuss the health effects of climate change by looking at extreme weather events, with a particular focus on flooding across various global regions. Based on a chapter co-authored with Amelia Fiske and Barbara Prainsack, I propose to understand health as a multidimensionally constituted state that is shaped by "natural", biological, ecological and social-political-economic factors that interact with each other across time and space. Research on this field needs to bring together different, mixed-methods approaches including inductive and qualitative research. Moreover, insights from transdisciplinary research should inform effective policy interventions, and contribute to reassessing strategies for protecting health amid a changing climate.

Climate change, informality, and sexual and reproductive health: An emergent “syndemic” in Kampala, Uganda

Megan Schmidt-Sane, Paul Isolo Mukwaya, Alice Sverdlik, Hakimu Sseviiri, Peter Kasaija

Whilst the impact of climate change on health outcomes is becoming clear, the disproportionate impact on women in urban informal settlements is yet to be fully evidenced. Drawing on years of research by the Urban Action Lab at Makerere University and ethnographic and participatory action research from The Urban Futures Project, we analyse the ways in which women living and working in urban informal settlements in Kampala, Uganda face synergistic vulnerabilities (a “syndemic”) related to (in)formality, climate change stressors, and sexual and reproductive health. In situations of insecure

housing and land tenure, income insecurities, and pressures related to floods and drought (Twinomuhangi et al., 2021), we observe multiple geographies of health vulnerabilities that are amplified by climate change, as it exacerbates existing (and creates new) pathways of stress for women living in urban informal settlements. Using a syndemics lens, we will highlight how women experiencing a range of climate change driven vulnerabilities across multiple temporal and spatial scales including displacement of homes and associated residential relocation, destruction of property, and increased energy costs interact with existing gendered vulnerabilities to shape health outcomes. Many women, for example, have become more reliant on transactional and other forms of sex work to bolster earnings. These structural and synergistic drivers (climate, urban), shape women's sexual and reproductive health, with hypothesised increases in HIV and other STIs. We will also highlight the agency of women in responding to these difficult circumstances through sociocultural practices which can be documented to inform community-driven interventions in Kampala.