



Gendered approach towards disaster recovery: Experiences from 2011 floods in Pathumthani province, Thailand



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ABSTRACT

Disaster recovery is multifaceted and depends upon various actors who are involved in coping up after a natural disaster. Gender plays a significant role during every phase of disaster management. Thailand suffered from its largest and most expensive floods in 2011 which devastated the industrial sectors hitting hardest on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). This study aims at learning from the experiences of women entrepreneurs who went through 2011 floods. The methods involved questionnaire survey, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Findings included barriers, success and failure stories among the women entrepreneurs in SMEs of the Pathumthani province in Thailand. Gendered approach was found to be key factor in faster recovery of SMEs from 2011 floods.

1. Introduction

Thailand is an upper middle income country with growing economy in the South East Asian region. The contribution towards its growth comes from both gender. However, lack of gendered research on the women entrepreneurs and managers in this region provides for a gap in the previous literature. Disaster being an imminent part of Thailand with vulnerability to floods, earthquakes, landslides, storms and Tsunami calls for a deeper understanding of how the society and business community copes with them.

Gender plays a vital role in the growth of any economy. In Thailand, women are actively participating in the economy, however, they face limitations in terms of socio-economic, legal and cultural practices [3]. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) which contribute to the economic and social growth of Thailand. SMEs were severely affected from 2011 floods in Thailand [33]. This study aims at learning from the experiences of 2011 floods in the Pathumthani province. Pathumthani was one of the most affected province during 2011 floods [45] and thus, selected as the study area to analyse the gendered impacts of disaster on SME managers.

2. Literature review

Previous literature provides for women studies in the SMEs but are restricted to upper income countries. There is a lack of focused studies among the developing economies regarding position of women business

managers during a disaster event. With increasing number of affected females during the natural disasters in the South East Asian region, focused studies on the middle income countries is needed.

2.1. Theoretical review

Disaster impact and resilience from natural disaster has been emerging as area of research among academics, policy makers and practitioners [24]. In order to achieve resilience in business, the enterprise requires to adopt strategies, models and enterprise structures to cope and recover faster from disaster events [42]. However, resilience and sustainability from disaster vulnerabilities is related to the adaptability and capacities at the individual level of the entrepreneurs and managers in an enterprise [21].

Disaster vulnerabilities of a SME depends on the exposed risk and measures adopted to manage the risk by the management [10,26]. Managing the financial risk towards the SME ensures the faster disaster recovery and business continuity [9]. However, SMEs tend to observe disaster risk management as not urgent [38] and uncertainty would be dealt whenever and if encountered [23]. This enhances the vulnerabilities of the SMEs towards future disaster events.

Vulnerabilities are not only limited to SMEs as an entity but extends to the gender bias at the top management level, excluding opportunities for female entrepreneurs and managers [2,37]. Social Role Theory is utilized as framework for this study [11] as the theory suggests that segregation is promoted through managers being expected in terms of

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social expectations and managers themselves have their own gender roles which reflect upon their behavior in an enterprise [12,13]. Vertical segregation also known as “glass ceiling” reflects that women are stuck at lower level of management in comparison to their male counterparts [41]. Horizontal segregation deals with the top management jobs that controls the enterprise [22]. Gendered segregation is enhanced with disaster vulnerable SMEs.

Women during disasters become more vulnerable due to imbalances prevailing in the society and comparative lower socio-economic status of women than their male counterparts [36]. Enhanced vulnerabilities of women results in increased stress and uncertainty among them, which in turn effect their decision making capacities during a disaster event. These limitations pose barrier for the women in actively leading at the top managerial levels in businesses in a disaster scenario [32]. Similar, constraints were experienced by the women entrepreneurs and managers during the 2011 Thailand floods.

2.2. SMEs and women managers

Gender dimensions of disaster affected business enterprise has been gaining interest among researchers [30]. Women managers are adversely affected by disaster events due to several constraints including occupational segregation, under-representation among top managerial level and societal expectations from women [1]. These constraints provide for lesser opportunities and capacities towards women managers, especially among the developing countries [20].

However, the manufacturing sector in the Thai economy has been blooming since 1960s [19] allowing the SMEs to grow and contribute largely to the Thai GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Previous research provides for evidence of slow progress for women at the managerial levels [47]. Gendered response to disaster is different in terms of capacity, exposure and understanding of disaster risk enhancing the vulnerabilities of the SMEs before, during and after a disaster event. Women are termed as more vulnerable during disaster events than men [28] and adversely affect the decision making capacities of the women managers at the managerial levels in SMEs [44].

2.3. Disaster risk reduction and women managers

Disaster risk reduction has been identified with an integral part of business continuity and sustainable growth. SME managers are responsible for the smooth recovery from devastating impacts of a disaster event. Disaster risk perception of the SME manager must be accurate in order to curb down the adverse disaster impacts. Women are often differently affected by disasters than men [5], therefore, for a holistic disaster risk reduction planning, deeper understanding of the gendered disaster management process is required. Disaster risk enhances the vulnerability and usually, women managers tend to choose the location which is surrounded by easily available resources and neglect the vulnerability of the location [39].

Similarly, women managers in Thailand tend to unadapt to disaster risk reduction initiatives even when they are set up in flood prone locales. This is line with heterogeneity with the mental stress, societal limitation, ethnic and religious perceptions among the women [4]. Reduced disaster risk reduction measures tend to enhance the vulnerabilities and risk exposure of women managers towards future disaster events. The personal attributes and additional family responsibilities are enhanced during disaster scenarios in amplify the adverse effect on Thai women managers [14].

2.4. Barriers to women managers

The enhanced vulnerabilities of women entrepreneurs and managers is line with the different choices they make during decision making process under a risk generated event [29]. This is due to several constraints adversely affecting the decision making capacities of women in

business including accessibility to aid, assistance and support frameworks, untimely risk information and lesser participation in the decision making process [6].

However, Women have been taking active participation in the development and growth of the Thai economy [17]. However, women managers often face barriers in reaching the top most position in a business enterprise [32]. These barriers include enterprises capital, structural and human resources, disaster risk perception, limited financial sources, social networks, business commitment and characteristics of the manager [39]. In order to recover faster from natural disaster such as floods, the women managers need to overcome these barriers and achieve sustainability in both their professional as well as personal lives.

3. Data and methods

The research paradigm is grounded in a pragmatic worldview as it focuses on the recovery solutions to adverse impacts of disasters. The pragmatist perspective is on the understanding of research as occurring in socio-political, economical and historical context seeking to incorporate social justice into research's practical application [8]. The methodology used in the research is mixed method research. The sequential exploratory strategy is undertaken in order to provide straightforward, well connected, described and analysed qualitative and quantitative data [7]. The instruments for quantitative data involved questionnaires and for qualitative data key informant interviews and focus group discussions were conducted.

Pathumthani province was selected as the study area as it was one of most affected province during 2011 floods [45]. The total population of SMEs in the Pathumthani province is 401 SMEs [31] and a sample size of 200 SMEs [46] were random purposively selected among the 2011 flood affected or encountered SMEs. SMEs were approached by phone call to get an appointment to extend questionnaire. There were 205 SMEs approached as among them 5 SMEs rejected an appointment schedule due to time constraint. The questionnaires were distributed to 200 SMEs. The questionnaires were dropped at the SMEs after a prior appointment and collected after one week. The response rate was 100% among the SMEs to whom questionnaires were distributed. The questionnaires were then checked for their completeness and quality of the answers and were found to be acceptable. The questionnaires were cross checked for their quality of the data and were found to be acceptable. The collected data was then entered into SPSS software for further data interpretation, representation and analysis. Therefore, the survey questionnaires were collected from a sample of 200 SMEs which were severely affected by 2011 floods. The questions were aimed at ascertaining demographic, skill levels, disaster risk perception, barriers during disaster recovery phase post 2011 floods and coping mechanisms adopted by the women and men entrepreneurs. Pseudo names were used to maintain the confidentiality of the respondent. However, for geotagging and mapping of the SMEs, prior consent were taken from the respondents. The geotagged SMEs were designated unique id numbers to conceal the actual name and location of SMEs.

Along with the survey questionnaires a total of 15 key informant interviews were conducted aiming at collecting detailed experiences of 2011 floods. The focus group discussion provided for holistic approach and position of women among the SME managers in the province. The focus group discussion was attended by participants from government offices, insurance companies, 3 male and 4 female SMEs respondents. The secondary sources include printed research articles, reports and various online literature pertaining to women managers.

4. Findings

SME managers were the primary respondents in this study and provided an insight on the experiences during 2011 floods. The 200 respondents were further divided into both male and female gender to

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