
**HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT AMONG INDIGENOUS WOMEN:
CHALLENGES, CONSEQUENCES AND POLICY GAPS**

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ABSTRACT

Human-wildlife conflict has evolved as one of the world's most prevalent and pressing environmental and socioeconomic issues. The main drivers of human-wildlife conflict are rapid population growth, human intrusion into forest areas, conversion of forest land to agricultural land, climate change, infrastructural development, and wild animal habitat loss. Communities living in close proximity to the forest fringe area are more vulnerable to human-wildlife conflict. Especially indigenous women face significant direct and indirect losses, including risks to their livelihoods, personal safety, health, and overall well-being. Only few studies have focused on the challenges that women suffer as a result of human-wildlife conflict. Current policies for wildlife conservation and conflict management fails to address the challenges faced by indigenous women. This study conducts a narrative analysis of existing literature to understand the challenges and consequences of human-wildlife conflict faced by indigenous women and to identify the policy gaps in addressing their vulnerabilities. The study suggests to improve the gender-specific approaches to animal conservation and conflict resolution strategies. The findings help for better understanding of the gendered impacts of human-wildlife conflict, as well as to improve the policies.

KEYWORDS: *Human-Wildlife Conflict, Indigenous Women, Environmental and Socio-Economic Issues, Challenges and Consequences, Policy Gaps.*

INTRODUCTION

India is one of the mega diverse countries of the world. It has unique ecological crossroads and it occupies around 8% of the world's biodiversity while supporting more than 17% of the world's human population within its 4% land area(*International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)*). Human-Wildlife conflict is the most pressing issues in the biodiversity hotspots like India. It refers to the negative interactions between human and wildlife which results in crop damage, livestock loss, property destructions and even loss of human lives(*World Wide Fund 2005*). Elephant, tiger, leopard, wild boar, and monkey incidents have increased over the last decade, especially in Kerala, Assam, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand and Tamil Nadu. These interactions result in deaths, serious injuries, crop and property destruction, and long-term psychological stress(*Barua et al., 2013; MoEFCC, 2023*).

Tribal women have daily, personal contact with forestsuffer a disproportionately severe burden.Tribal women frequently enter into forest any time for the collection of firewood, medicinal plants, wild vegetables, fruits, non-timber forest products and most of the time they travel long distance to fetch water streams and rivers. They do farming along managing livestock and also guarding crops at night time(*Agarwal, 2001; Ogra, 2008*). In communities in Northeast India, for example, research has found that women continue to perform these provisioning and care roles even when elephant populations increase in aggression, making their exposure to wildlife near-constant(*Ogra, 2008*).

Furthermore, when men migrate seasonally or permanently for wage labour, a common livelihood strategy in tribal India,women are often left to manage household responsibilities along with forest-related activities. The gendered inclusive challenges and consequences of HWC are often overlooked in policy discussions. Most of the existing studies focus on common people and farmers affected by human-wildlife conflict. The problems faced by indigenous women have limited attention. This research attempts to bridge that gap by providing a comprehensive, pan-India literature-based evaluation of the economic, physical, psychological, and policy-related issues confronting tribal women as a result of HWC.

OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the challenges and consequences of human-wildlife conflict among tribal women.
2. To identify the policy gaps in addressing the problems faced by tribal women due to human-wildlife conflict.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on an existing literature review on human–wildlife conflict and its impacts on tribal women. There around 45 published studies including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government reports were reviewed. The selected literature was critically analysed to understand the challenges faced by tribal women, the consequences of human–wildlife conflict on their livelihoods and well-being, and the existing policy gaps. The findings from various studies were organized into major themes, including challenges, consequences, and policy implications. Based on the review, recommendations were proposed to address the issues faced by tribal women in human–wildlife conflict-prone areas.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sekar and Bhavani (2021) discussed about the physical and emotional difficulties faced by tribal women due to human–wildlife conflict more than men. Because women are responsible for collecting firewood, fetching water, and working in farms, they are more exposed to wildlife encounters. However, women are rarely involved in conflict management and decision-making processes. The study suggested to include gender perspectives in human–wildlife conflict policies.

Bhatia et. al., (2020) reported that tribal households suffer economic losses due to crop damage and livestock loss caused by wildlife. Women are more affected because they play a major role in livestock management. The study also found that compensation schemes often fail to reach women because of complex procedures and male-dominated systems. The study recommended gender-inclusive compensation mechanisms.

Constant and Razafindratsima (2022) examined that women experience greater fear of wildlife encounters than men. This fear restricts their movement and affects their ability to collect resources and earn income. As a result, women face food insecurity and increased dependence on other family members. The study suggested that conflict mitigation programmes should consider women's safety and economic independence.

Mukeka et. al., (2019) analysed that crop raiding by wildlife has serious consequences for women in tribal communities. Since women are mainly responsible for household food security, crop losses increase their economic burden. The study also found that women often have limited access to early warning systems and conflict mitigation information.

Rahmania et. al., (2021) examined the psychological impacts of human–wildlife conflict and found that women experienced higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression than men. The continuous responsibility of protecting crops, livestock, and children affected their mental

well-being. The study suggested to improve the mental health support and conflict management programmes.

Butt et. al., (2021) highlighted that existing conservation policies often ignore the specific needs of women. Tribal women, who have limited land rights and political representation, receive less protection from current policies. The study recommends improvement in gender-sensitive conservation policies and stronger protection of women's rights.

Upriy et. al., (2018) reported that indigenous women's traditional knowledge about wildlife behaviour and conflict prevention is rarely considered in formal wildlife management. The exclusion of indigenous women's knowledge weakens conservation efforts and conflict mitigation strategies. The study recommended involving indigenous women in policy development and decision-making.

Katuwal et. al., (2020) discussed that poverty, low education levels, and lack of awareness increase the vulnerability of tribal women to human–wildlife conflict. Women often lack information about compensation schemes and legal support. The study recommended awareness programmes and legal literacy initiatives for women living in conflict-prone areas.

Barua et. al., (2023) highlighted that women bear not only direct economic losses but also hidden costs such as lost opportunities, psychological stress, and additional workload. The study identified major policy gaps, including the absence of gender-sensitive data and inadequate institutional support. The authors recommended gender-responsive approaches to human–wildlife conflict management.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Human-Wildlife Conflict among Tribal Women

Main Drivers of Human-Wildlife Conflict

(Rapid Population Growth, Infrastructure Development, Climate Change, Habitat Loss of Wildlife, Changing Forest Land into Agricultural Land)



Human-Wildlife Conflict



Tribal Women's Exposures into Forest

(Firewood Collection, Non-Timber Forest Products Collection, Livestock Grazing)



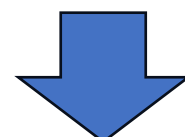
Challenges Faced by Tribal Women

(Risk of wildlife attacks, Restricted Mobility and Access to Resources, etc)



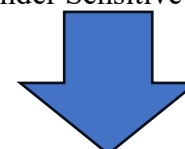
Consequences

(Economic Consequences, Social Consequences, Health Consequences)



Policy Gaps

(Inadequate Compensation, Lack of Gender Sensitive Approaches)



Recommendations

CHALLENGES

Indigenous women face many of the problems due to human-wildlife conflict while entering into the wild. Some of the problems faced by tribal women are discussed below.

Risk of Wildlife Attacks

Indigenous women frequently enter forests to collect firewood, fetch water, gather non-timber forest products and sometimes perform farming activities in agricultural fields. These responsibilities increase their exposure to wild animals such as elephants, wild boars, leopards, and bears. As a result, women face a constant risk of injury, disability, or even death due to wildlife attacks as well as affected by mental health problems *Ogra (2008)*.

Restricted Mobility and Access to Resources

The fear of wild animal attacks often restricts women entering the forests and surrounding areas. Many women avoid certain routes or reduce the frequency of forest visits, making it difficult to access essential resources such as fuelwood, water, fodder, and medicinal plants (*Ogra (2008)*).

Crop and Livestock Protection Burden

Women have an important role in protecting crops and cattle from wildlife harm. They are often necessary to watch agricultural areas both during the day and at night, especially during harvest season. This responsibility causes physical weariness and makes them more susceptible to wildlife interactions (*Bhatia et. al., (2020)*).

Loss of Forest-Based Livelihood Activities

Many indigenous women rely on forests to gather non-timber forest products such as honey, fruits, medicinal plants, and firewood. Human-wildlife conflict can restrict access to these resources, reducing livelihood options and lowering household income(*Bhatia et. al., (2020)*).

Psychological Stress and Fear

Continuous exposure to wildlife hazards causes indigenous women to experience worry, anxiety, and emotional stress. Concerns over personal safety, family members, crops, and animals can have a severe impact on their mental health and quality of life(*Barua, Bhagwat & Jadhav (2013)*).

Limited Participation in Decision-Making

Despite their intimate connection to forest resources and wildlife, indigenous women are frequently excluded from wildlife management and conflict resolution decision-making processes. Indigenous knowledge and experiences are rarely included into policy development and implementation(*Uprety et. al., (2018)*).

Difficulties in Accessing Compensation and Support

Many women struggle to receive compensation for agricultural loss, livestock damage, or wildlife injury. Lack of understanding, complicated administrative procedures, and limited access to information frequently hinder them from receiving enough government support(*Bhatia et. al., (2020)*).

CONSEQUENCES OF HUMAN – WILDLIFE CONFLICT

Human–wildlife conflict affects not only crops, livestock, and property but also the livelihoods, health, and well-being of local communities. Indigenous women often experience greater impacts because of their close interaction with forest resources and their responsibilities in managing households, agriculture, and livestock. The major consequences of human–wildlife conflict faced by indigenous women are discussed below.

- Economic Consequences
- Social Consequences
- Health Consequences

Economic Consequences

Human–wildlife conflict causes significant economic losses to indigenous households. Crop damage, livestock loss, and reduced access to forest products decrease household income and threaten food security(*Ogra, 2008; Barua et. al., 2013; Nyhus, 2016*)

Social Consequences

Women often experience increased responsibilities and reduced opportunities for education and social participation. The loss of livelihood resources can also affect family well-being and community stability. *(Banerjee & Sharma, 2021)*

Health Consequences

Wildlife attacks can cause injuries and fatalities. In addition, constant fear and uncertainty lead to stress, anxiety, and psychological trauma among women and their families. *(Barua et al., 2013; Chowdhury et. al., 2016; Ogra, 2008)*

Policy Gap

Despite the significant impacts of human–wildlife conflict on women, existing policies often overlook their specific needs. Compensation schemes are frequently delayed and may not adequately address women's losses. Women's participation in decision-making and conflict management remains limited. There is also a lack of gender-specific data and insufficient mental health support for affected women. *(Ogra, 2008; Banerjee & Sharma, 2021; Agarwal, 2009)*

CONCLUSION

Human-wildlife conflict has developed as a major socioeconomic and environmental issue, particularly for tribal women who live in and around forest areas. Tribal women face numerous obstacles as a result of their gender-specific responsibilities and reliance on forest resources, such as higher exposure to wildlife encounters, restricted mobility, increased workload, and limited access to livelihood supplies. These problems frequently result in significant economic losses, food insecurity, physical injuries, psychological pain and decreased well-being. The study also finds that existing human–wildlife conflict management and compensation schemes do not adequately address the specific needs and experiences of indigenous women. Their knowledge, perspectives, and contributions are still underrepresented in decision-making and conflict resolution process. The study suggests an urgent need for gender-sensitive and inclusive ways to managing human-wildlife conflict. Ensuring women's participation in policy formation, enhancing access to compensation and support services, increasing livelihood options, and respecting indigenous women's ecological knowledge can all help to empower women and mitigate conflict. Promoting long-term cohabitation between humans and wildlife necessitates not only biodiversity protection, but also the protection of the rights, livelihoods, and well-being of the women who live on the front lines of these conflicts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To develop and implement gender-sensitive human–wildlife conflict management policies that recognize the specific needs of indigenous women.
- To simplify compensation procedures and ensure timely compensation for crop damage, livestock loss, injuries and other losses caused by wildlife.
- To increase the participation of indigenous women in wildlife conservation, conflict management, and local decision-making processes.
- Provide awareness and training programmes on wildlife safety, conflict prevention, and risk management strategies.
- Strengthen mental health and psychosocial support services for women affected by wildlife-related incidents.

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