Social costs of HWC: a gender-sensitive perspective from Uttarakhand, India

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Research Approach and Questions

- HD research and HWC: Political ecology approach
- Strengths: local to global scales, actors, costs, drivers
- Gaps: gender-based experiences, individual scale

What are the material and social costs of HWC, and how (if at all) are they shaped by gender?
1. Direct vs indirect effects?
2. Distribution of cost burdens?
3. Participants’ perceptions?

Methodology: Case Study

- "Bhalalogpur Village"
- PA-dependent agriculturalists
- Low level of village-level caste/class heterogeneity
- Conflict with elephants.
- Largely qualitative approach (ethnographic)
- 9 mos fieldwork (2003-2004)

Study Area

Rajaji NP (Uttarakhand)
- Established 1983, part of RCC (elephant migration corridor)
- Shrinking range — RNP is NW limit
- RNP has 100+ forest-dependent villages within 5 km radius

Study area: fragmented & multi-use

Question 1

What are the direct and indirect effects of conflict with elephants (crop-raiding and attack/encounter) for park-dependent villagers?
Direct Effects of Crop-Raiding by Elephants

- Crop Loss
- Property Damage

Indirect Effects of Crop-Raiding by Elephants

1. Decreased Food Security
   - Greater need for cash
   - Effects on well-being

2. Increase in Workload
   - Night Guarding
   - Repair of Fencing
   - Biomass Collection

Women "just do the adjustment"

Night guarding is considered "men’s" work but 1/3 reported that they rely on females to do it.

Women must find large poles at the risk of encountering elephants or forest guards.

Women engaged in fodder collection near RNP.
**Indirect Effects of Crop-Raiding by Elephants**

(2) Increase in Workload

- Night Guarding
- Repair of Fencing
- Biomass Collection
- Removal of Damaged Crops / Replanting

Women's agricultural work involves exposure to heat, insects, and pathogens.

**Attack: Direct Effects**

(as reported in interviews “within past 5 years”)

1. **Deaths**: 2 / RNP (both were women)
2. **Major injury**: 2 / Village (both were men)
3. **Minor injury**: 10 / RNP (all reported for women)

**Indirect Effects of Attack by Elephants**

(1) Economic Hardship

“The elephant made my son’s condition very serious by kicking him. My son was bedridden for three months…God saved his life. He is OK now, but there is still some problem with his walking… I have bills of 32,000 rupees [~US $650] that were spent on him.”

**Indirect Effects of Attack by Elephants**

(2) Fear

“Do you feel afraid of encounters with wild animals…”
- within the village: 50%
- inside RNP: 93%

(No gender differences observed)

“When we go to the forest it is all fear for us, but we have no choice…We have to go.”

**Indirect Effects of Attack by Elephants**

(3) Increased Unpaid Workload and Stress

- Loss of contributed labor of female victim (e.g., abandoned and future biomass resources)
- Other family members “pick up the slack”

Women routinely climb tall trees to avoid elephants.

**Question 2**

To what extent do these effects differentially impact men and women?
Differential Impacts

- Effects borne by men
  - Tend to be direct, are seen
  - Relate to cash economy
  - Addressed "legitimately"

- Effects borne by women
  - Tend to be indirect and unseen
  - Relate to body and psyche
  - Addressed through increased risk.

Question 3

How do participants perceive relationships between gender and costs of HWC?

Summary and Implications

- Many social costs of HWC – effects are often indirect
- Indirect effects matter
- Gender matters
  - Gender-based DOL naturalizes and hides burden
  - Risk is part of domestic work – contributes to status

Ways Forward?

Need to bridge gender gaps in HWC research and conservation initiatives.

At the same time, it is crucial to avoid essentializing "women" into a single group. Class, caste, age, and other such differences need to be recognized in this process.

Who is more affected by HWC, if anyone?

Aggregate and disaggregated by gender: No variance in results!
- Men: 4%
- Women: 51%
- It is equal: 44%

For women, "invisibility" of female burden is linked to...
- Collective silencing
- Notions of sacrifice/duty
- Work and risk → Status
- Unpaid labor (and goods) = "free"
- Social value associated with forest use

We could try to buy LPG, but getting wood is free. Besides, what else would I do with my time?"
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