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**Title: The impact of natural disaster on women's empowerment, aspiration, and mental health indicators: Evidence from the 2015 Nepal earthquake**



Growing evidence suggests women are more vulnerable to natural disasters than men. Studies show disparities in risk exposure and access to resources and opportunities that disadvantage women (Neumayer and Plümper, 2007; WHO, 2002; Oxfam, 2005). This paper analyzes the effect of natural disaster, specifically the 2015 Nepal earthquake, on women's aspirations, mental health, and empowerment. We use household-level panel data from rural Nepal from 2014 and 2016, and the Modified Mercalli Intensity (MMI) scale data from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) to study the effects of earthquake intensity on women's aspirations, mental health, and empowerment. We exploit variation in earthquake intensity across villages and control for household fixed effects to measure the effects of earthquake intensity on changes in outcomes within households. We find heightened exposure to the earthquake had a negative effect on women's aspirations. The effect is greater for those living in temporary shelters one year later, while the receipt of cash aid attenuated the effect. This work complements the findings of Kosec and Mo (2017) who demonstrate a negative effect on aspirations following the 2010 floods in Pakistan. Other economic literature suggests aspirations have a strong effect on investment and future-oriented behavior. Therefore, it is important to consider aspirational capacities when assessing resilience. Contrary to expectation, earthquake-affected households appear to have higher mental health. Results also show the earthquake increased women's empowerment, as measured by a modified women's empowerment in agriculture index (Alkire et al, 2013). This could be due to everyone having greater responsibilities and a shared sense of duty to restore their lives during a crisis situation. However, it also appears to be driven by women working less, which raises some uncertainty regarding the true welfare effects. This study adds to the literature exploring the effects of a negative shock on individual welfare in developing countries. While the results add to the existing literature that a disaster negatively affects aspiration, they also provide evidence that earthquake could distort the intrahousehold decision-making dynamics by giving women more voice. Further investigation is needed to determine whether this change persists over time.