

Major Health Issues of Women in Pakistan

Women's health issues in Pakistan take a backseat among the other cultural and social responsibilities that she undertakes. Women's mortality rates during pregnancy are among the highest in the world, and with poverty and one of the worst rankings in the world for gender empowerment, there is currently very little being done to alleviate the problem (Asian Development Bank, 2009). Women and girls are four times as likely to suffer from malnutrition, one of the most significant being iron deficiency anemia. Communicable diseases among women are an easy source of infection for the offspring as well, which is due to many factors of poor hygiene, poverty, lack of education and awareness, and inability to access good health facilities (Asian Development Bank, 2009).

Women currently constitute around fifty one percent of the total population of Pakistan. Most of these women reside in poor or village areas of Pakistan, where there are no health facilities available. The young ages of marriage and childbirths and lack of experienced staff lead to complications during delivery and afterwards, that are a significant cause of morbidity and mortality among young women. Under and malnutrition is a common finding.

The Factors that Contribute To the Poor Health Condition of Women

1. **Patriarchal Society:** Women have little or no say in the sexual life. The man of the house (husband) usually decides whether or not contraceptives may be used and in most cases it not conceivable that a woman asks her husband for a condom or birth control pills or attempts to buy these. Sex is a taboo subject in Pakistan and good women are not supposed to talk about it in private or in public.
2. **Early Marriages:** The dowry system which prevails in Pakistan (as in most of the Asian countries) ^{not like on time} prompts the parents to marry their daughters at a tender age because (i) it costs less when they are young and (ii) it would mean less expenses in her maintenance.
3. **High fertility** on an average there may be about 5.3 births per woman which is very high. Since women do not have much say in sex and contraceptives, it is difficult for them to protect themselves for frequent pregnancies, which most often contribute to their sickness and even death. Only about 20% of the women have professional assistance during delivery which is also a factor of high infant mortality rate.
4. **HIV and AIDS Risk:** Since there is no way to say 'no' to sex in ^{marital, married} conjugal life the women are open to being ^{infected} by HIV and AIDS virus if and when the husbands are ^{immoral} promiscuous. There is an ^{terrible} appalling lack of awareness among women about sex and its connection to AIDS/HIV as well as other sexually transmitted diseases.
5. **Abortions:** Many women (married and unmarried) have abortions which are done in unhygienic conditions by persons who are not fully qualified to do so. The result is a number of complications and even death.
6. **Poor Nutrition:** The woman's role in the household is to support the male - he may be her husband, son, father or brother. The woman would most often ensure that all the best food and nutrients is made available to the males, while she would subsist on whatever remains.
7. **Lack of Awareness & Facilities:** Lack of any education and awareness, coupled with poverty and male dominant societal patterns, which do not allow women to seek medical help. Women are often refused to be consulted by a male physician, and female doctors remain ^{deficient} deficient, which increases problems in access to care. Poor health in women leads to poor health and development of children. Hence a whole generation of children is also suffering from the ^{difficulty} plights of poor health of women. There is a serious deficit in the use of family planning practices with no say of woman in this regard.

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Major Issues of Health

Malnutrition

According to a Ministry of Health policy paper, 'Gender awareness policy appraisal-2006', one of the major reasons for this high maternal mortality rate is malnutrition, which affects 34 percent of pregnant women. Around 48 percent of lactating mothers have a calorie intake of 70 percent less than the recommended level. This is bad for the health of the mother as well the baby.

Lack of Health Facilities

Another reason is child delivery at home without assistance by trained medical attendants. The MMR is much higher in Pakistan's rural areas than in urban areas. This is largely due to the fact that skilled medical staffs attend a fairly low proportion of births in rural areas.

Iron Deficiency

In addition, 45 percent of Pakistani women suffer from iron deficiency that results in stillbirths, birth defects, mental retardation and infant deaths. Hemorrhage, hypertension, unsafe abortion, infections and prolonged labor are other factors contributing to the higher mortality rate among women in rural areas. *make longer*

Iron deficiency anemia occurs when the dietary intake or absorption of iron is insufficient due to which hemoglobin in cannot be formed. The principal cause of iron deficiency anemia is loss of blood specially in premenopausal women during menses, poor absorption of iron by the body, parasitic infections (such as hookworms), chronic inflammations, deficiencies of other micronutrients (like folic acid), Malaria etc. The unfortunate victims of the deficiency can experience fainting or feeling faint, depression, breathlessness, tingling, numbness, burning sensations, sleep apnea, missed menstrual cycle, heavy menstrual period, slow social development, or nails that are weak or brittle and poor appetite. *poor health*

Health Risks of Early Pregnancy

When a woman is too young, pregnancy wanted or unwanted can be dangerous for both mother and infant. Complications of childbirth and unsafe abortion are among the main causes of death for women under age 20. Even under optimal conditions, young mothers, especially those under age 17, are more likely than women in their 20s to suffer pregnancy-related complications and to die in childbirth. The risk of death may be two to four times higher, depending upon the woman's health and socioeconomic status. According to UNICEF, no girl should become pregnant before the age of 18 because she is not yet physically ready to bear children. Babies of mothers younger than 18 tend to be born premature and have low body weight; such baby are more likely to die in the first year of life.

Other Diseases

Hepatitis, AIDS, tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases is the new wave of infections that have led to a high rate of deaths among women of Pakistan. Pakistani women also suffer from high rates of breast and oral cancers. Chronic illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, thyroid problems etc. all are very prevalent.

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