

Female Healthcare: A Forgotten Cause

1) Introduction

Thesis Statement: Female healthcare has become a long-forgotten cause. Women inequality, limited financial resources, and baseless social norms have laid the foundation of this negligence. However, with proper governance and women empowerment, the situation can be improved.

2) The Abject State of women healthcare

3) How female healthcare has become a forgotten cause

- a) Lack of proper health facilities for women
- b) Unavailability of female physicians
- c) Illiteracy and unawareness of the importance of woman's health
- d) Discussion of woman's health problems is considered a taboo
- e) Unfounded traditions and religious beliefs
- f) Forced and underage marriage
- g) Teenage pregnancy leading to health complications
- h) Physical and sexual violence

(i) Emotional disorder and poor mental health of women

4) Impacts of negligence of female healthcare

(a) Loss of an important asset of the nation

(b) High rates of maternal deaths

(c) Repression of poor female health also entails socioeconomic deterioration of family

5) Strategies to ameliorate the healthcare system of women

(a) Women empowerment to increase the accessibility to health facilities

(b) Mobilization of female physicians for backward areas

(c) Establishment of specialized female healthcare facilities

(d) Launching an effective awareness campaign for female health problems

6) Conclusion

Female Healthcare: A Forgotten Cause

Allah Almighty says in the Holy Quran, "They (your wives) are your garment, and you are a garment for them." Today, man has failed to protect the very garment which provides safety and comfort to him.

It is in a state of devastation, for women healthcare has become a forgotten cause. There is a myriad of factors which have caused this negligence, one of which is lack of proper health facilities for women. Furthermore, there is unavailability of female physicians, illiteracy, unawareness and baseless social norms. Forced and underage marriage, unplanned pregnancy, and domestic violence leading to emotional disorders have further aggravated the problem. This gross treatment of women's health has given an alarming rise in maternal deaths which completely deteriorate the socioeconomic dimensions of a family. Above all, the nation is losing the most important asset: women. The writing is on the

wall, but the situation is not completely hopeless. With women empowerment, mobilization of female physicians, awareness campaigns, and development of specialized female healthcare facilities, this problem can be solved. Female healthcare has become a long-forgotten cause. Women inequality, limited financial resources, and baseless social norms are the primary reasons of it. However, with proper governance and women empowerment, the situation can be improved.

Women who are the cornerstone of any society are facing any acute state of healthcare. Everyday approximately 810 pregnant women die from preventable causes (WHO, Women's Health, 2022). The sad aspect of this situation is that women are dying from preventable causes. Furthermore, about 40% of the women are suffering from anaemia. The situation of women's health is far more depressing in third world countries. For example,

every year, about 311,000 women die, and 85% of these deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries (WHO, Women's Health, 2022). Thus, there is an immediate need to tackle this dilemma.

One of the most critical cause of the poor status of women's health is lack of proper health facilities. Due to limited access to proper health facilities, women health issues cannot be diagnosed or treated. This lack of health facilities is especially dominant in third world countries like Pakistan. For example, the backward areas of KPK and Balochistan have scarce or no health facilities at all. This has made the access to a trained specialist nearly impossible for women who are entirely dependent on their husbands. Thus, lack of health facilities has deteriorated women healthcare.

Not only there is lack of health facilities, but there is also unavailability of female

physicians. Most of the females are not comfortable in discussing their health problems with male physicians, hence, the unavailability of female physicians has compounded the problem. In Pakistan, for example, the ratio of female to male physicians is very low. Even though, the proportion of female physicians in colleges is very high, but after graduation 70% of the women are not allowed to practise. Compared to 64% men, only 18% women are employed (Itina Usmani, How Pakistani healthcare is failing women, 2022). It follows the problem of female healthcare has been made more severe by shortage of female physicians.

This quagmire has been further exacerbated by illiteracy and unawareness of the importance of women's health. In backward areas, women are completely dependent on men who are completely illiterate and have no knowledge of female health problems, thus, they blatantly refuse to provide health facilities

to women, until the disease has been severely aggravated. This factor is quite dominant in third world countries where there is a frightening gender inequality. In the tribal and backward areas of Pakistan, men, for example, do not even care for menstruation period. It can be concluded that unawareness and illiteracy have also transformed women healthcare into a forgotten cause.

Not only there is illiteracy and unawareness, the discussion of women's health problem is considered a taboo. As a result, men, and in some instances, even women are not fully aware of severity of the issue. For example, in Pakistan, the discussion of menstruation period is considered a taboo. A survey conducted in a health facility of Karachi shows that 77.7% of the women never had any class or session related to menstruation, and 39.7% women knew that menstruation brought physical changes. Thus, social norms, which make discussion of female health problems a taboo, are another hurdle in this journey.

Along with ~~the~~ illiteracy, groundless social and religious norms have also had pernicious impacts on women's healthcare. Traditions, which do not have a leg to stand on, coerce people, especially of African countries, to subject women to harmful and deleterious processes. One prominent example of this animalistic behaviour is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in African countries.

About 200 million girls and women in more than 30 African countries have undergone FGM which leads to bleeding, infection and complications in pregnancy (WHO, Female Genital Mutilation, 2022)

Thus, unfounded religious and social norms have had deleterious impacts on women's health.

The baseless social norms also entail teenage marriage. Women are forced into underage marriage which leads to teenage pregnancy and a tremendous pressure of handling and managing family affairs. All of these factors have harmful impacts on women's health.

Pakistan, for example, has failed to control underage marriage. Even though, the legal age of marriage in Pakistan is 18 years, but 4.6 million girls are forced into marriage before the age of 15, and 18.9 million girls are impelled to marry someone before the age of 18 (UNICEF, child marriage profile - Pakistan, 2021). It can be concluded that teenage or underage marriage is another factor behind the poor health status of women.

The underage marriage further leads to teenage and unplanned pregnancy. Underage girls are not at all capable of dealing with

~~The~~ complications of pregnancy, and when they are forced to do so, it creates a lot of health problems for them. Over the past few decades, the situation of teenage pregnancy has not at all improved in Pakistan.

The teenage pregnancy predictor decreased from 54.4% in 1990-1991 to only 43.7% in 2017-2018 (S. Abid, Teenage Pregnancy Prevalence and Predictors, 2022)

Thus, teenage pregnancy also has harmful impacts on women's health.

Along with forced marriage and teenage pregnancy, women are also subjected to sexual and physical violence. The violence imposes long-term physical and mental damage to women. The violence against women is prevalent not only in Pakistan, but also all around the globe. A survey conducted in a health facility of Quetta shows that 31% of the women had suffered from physical violence (A. Saif-ur-Rahman, Gender-based violence in Pakistan and public health measures, 2021). Furthermore, all around

the globe, one in three women has experienced domestic, physical and sexual violence, all of which creates severe health complications (WHO, Violence Against Women, 2021). It follows that women's health also severely suffers from violence.

The most prominent impact of violence is emotional disorders and poor mental health. The poor mental health leads to depression and suicide. Due to violence, the mental health of women in Pakistan is very much degraded as compared to men. For example, women are three times more likely to have poor mental health as compared to men due to violence, economic dependency, and the pressure of having a male offspring (Shahana Shah, Women, mental health and suicide in Gilgit Baltistan, 2022). Thus, the dilemma of women's health has been compounded by mental and emotional disorders.

As women healthcare has become a forgotten cause, its impacts are severe, and have a wide range, one of which is loss of an important asset. Women are the cornerstone of any society; they are the foundation upon which the whole superstructure of a nation depends. Due to the poor healthcare of women, we are losing the most important asset. Whether its education, industry, commerce, politics or medical field, women play an important role. Thus, due to poor healthcare, a nation cannot utilize the full potential of women.

Due to the so-called healthcare of women, there is an alarming increase in maternal deaths.

Undesired pregnancy, improper treatment of female health problems, and lack of facilities lead to the death of both the mother and the child. In Pakistan, maternal deaths are increasing at a frightening rate. Currently, there are 126 maternal deaths per 100,000. The number is 26% higher in

2021 areas (M. Hanif, Maternal Mortality
in Rural Areas of Pakistan, 2021).

It follows that one of the devastating
impact of this negligence is high
maternal deaths. ~~It is~~

Another repercussion of poor
health system and maternal deaths is
the harmful impacts on socioeconomic
status of a family. The poor health
or death of a ~~mother~~ mother, who is
the heart and core of a family, completely
destroys the socioeconomic conditions of
a family. It has deleterious effects
on the growth and training of
children. A child is most likely to
suffer from improper diet, emotional and
mental distress, and an inability to
fully utilize its capabilities in school.

It can be concluded that poor
health of women and maternal deaths
also have violent impact on children.

This problem is not an
unsolvable conundrum, for it can be
solved by taking various measures,
one of which is women empowerment.
The accessibility to health facilities

and proper treatment can be improved by empowering women, who are fully dependent on men. The government must ensure that women have access to ~~the~~ education, and are fully capable of developing in-demand skills and earning a livelihood. This would ultimately free them from the ~~entanglement~~ entanglement of economic dependency, and they would be able to avail health facilities on their own. Thus, women empowerment is the grassroot factor in improving healthcare of women.

Furthermore, there is a need to mobilize teams of trained female physicians to backward areas. The women in backward areas who are economically dependent and have no access to health facilities would surely benefit from this measure. The mobilized team would establish free camps to conduct thorough checkup of women and to prescribe appropriate medicines upon identification of any health problem. Furthermore, if a very serious disease or problem is

identified then women must be directed to nearby health facilities for appropriate treatment. It follows that trained teams of female physicians would help to improve the health of backward areas.

Along with specialized teams of female physicians, the government needs to establish health facilities mainly focused on treatment of common female health problems. Most of women do not have access to proper treatment, therefore, by establishing health facilities focused on female diseases, the complications due to lack of treatment can be reduced. It is important that such facilities are funded by the government to provide free health facilities. Furthermore, these health centres must be equipped with all the machinery necessary for proper treatment. Hence, establishment of specialized health centres for women is another measure which must be undertaken.

The government must also launch an effective campaign to increase the awareness of female health problems. No matter how many health facilities there are, no matter how many female physicians there are, if people are not willing to understand the importance of female health, no one can coerce them to avail the facilities. Internet, television, newspapers, social media and voice messages or phone calls can be proved to be very effective. The campaign must ~~do~~ throw some light over the importance of female health and outcome of negligence in this regard. Thus, to fully tackle this challenge, an effective campaign must be launched.

The above discussion can be summarized by stating that limited financial resources, unproved religious and social norms, illiteracy, and unawareness are the primary factors behind poor healthcare of women. The underage marriage, ~~or~~ unplanned pregnancy and violence against

women have their own role to play in this dilemma. Due to this negligence, women, who are the most important asset of any nation, have suffered greatly. The after-shocks of this problem can be felt in the devastation of social life and high maternal deaths. However, by empowering women, establishing specialized health centres, dispatching teams of female physicians, and increasing awareness with an effective campaign, this conundrum can be solved. Only then man would be able to protect the garment which provides him safety and comfort.