

PART-II

Question no. 7:

Answers Introduction:

Women are Deprived of Even Basic Health Facilities: Pakistan, being a developing country, is not a safe place for women, especially in terms of good health facilities. With meagre health budgets and policies, women are deprived of even basic health facilities, which is basically the state's duty to provide.

Women are Facing a Myriad of Health Problems:

Women are currently facing a myriad of health problems such as
(i) malnutrition due to discrimination,
(ii) Female infanticide,
(iii) pre and post-pregnancy related issues, etc.

Need to Address Health Problems of Women:

Thus, keeping in mind the health problems being faced by women, there is a need to address these problems seriously and find a way out for the betterment of women as a whole.

Current Health Issues Being Faced by Women in

Pakistan: There are numerous health issues being faced by women in Pakistan. Following are the current health issues being faced by women in Pakistan.

(i) Medical Help during Floods of 2022 was Delayed: Currently the health status of women in Pakistan is not in good hands. Especially the floods of 2022 have cast a spell of destruction on women's health.

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Women are Bearing Most of Brunt of Tragic Floods:
Women are the ones bearing most of these tragic and destructive floods.

Destruction Due to Floods was Enormous:

Almost 1,400 health facilities as per a health specialist who works in UNFPA, have been destroyed across Balochistan and Sindh due to these floods.

Fertile Women were in Dire Need of Urgent Health Facilities: Not just that, among 30 million women, 1.6 million women of reproductive age were in dire need of urgent health facilities.

(ii) Social Dogma Limit the Rights and Access to Reproductive Health Services.

It is not just the natural calamities which act as an obstacle in the way of women's health, but other social dogmas such as patriarchy and old rituals limit access of women to reproductive health services as well. Concept of Midwives is still prevalent.

For instance, the concept of midwives is not new, and rural areas still have more faith in midwives rather than skilled gynaecologists.

Midwives Opt for Traditional Methods/Ways: Midwives opt for traditional ways to provide health services to women, but they may cause unhygienic conditions which could be dangerous for both mother and child.

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Male Members of the Household also stick to concept of Midwives: Not just that, but the male members of the household also stick to the concept of midwives, thus making it difficult for women to access new technology and reproductive rights.

(iii) Domestic Violence is a Chief Source of Complications in Pregnancy:

Domestic Violence is Wide-spread in Pakistan: According to Pak Med Association, almost 10 to 70 percent of women are subject to domestic violence once in their lifetime.

Domestic Violence May be Attributed to Several Reasons:

Domestic violence may be attributed to several reasons, such as financial problems, poverty, women's lack of decision making power in the household and

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the demand for a male child.

Various Women's Reproductive Issues are Produced.

These causes produce various women's health issues related to reproduction such as sexual disorders, gynaecological disarray, antenatal disruptions, vaginal blood loss and sometimes miscarriage.

Domestic Violence Leads to Miscarriage. The medical research by Nishkar Hospital in Multan in 2019 examined 16 women who were admitted to the hospital with bruises on their bodies during pregnancy. They also said that the reason behind the first miscarriage was domestic violence by the intimate partner or, in some cases, other in-law.

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(iv) Forced Pregnancies and Lack of Access to Family Planning Services:

Forced and Unwanted Pregnancies are prevalent issue in Pakistan: Forced and unwanted pregnancies are yet another prevalent issue faced by women in Pakistan.

Nearly Half of the Pregnancies are Unintended:

Studies in Family Planning 2014 reported that nearly half of the pregnancies were unintended, thus leading to abortion.

Unintended Births, Induced Abortions and Miscarriages are Numerous: Unintended births account for 16 percent, while induced abortions and miscarriages were reported as 25 and 6 percent, respectively.

Women are Deprived of Reproductive Rights.

Women are not given reproductive rights or the right to make decision, for that matter, regarding how many children they want to have.

Population Explosion and Lack of Resources on Collective Scale:

This leads to a population explosion and lack of resources not just for one family but on a collective stage thus causing long-term health problems for women.

(v) Malnutrition of Girls/Women Induced by Discrimination:

Discrimination is Induced by Male Members of Society:

Discrimination is mainly induced by the male members of society since they prefer spending on male children more than on female ones.

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Malnutrition is a common issue for women. UNICEF Pakistan Maternal Nutrition Strategy suggested that malnutrition is common in women, especially during pregnancy, thus causing post-natal issues for both mother and child. Malnutrition causes many health issues for women.

This malnutrition thus causes iodine, calcium deficiency, stillbirth, waste, stunting of child growth, short stature, folic acid insufficiency, instant (abortion) abortion, placental abruption, etc.

Lack of Medical Facilities for Women in Rural Areas:

Women in rural areas lack medical facilities to report such complications, therefore, unintentionally converting them into long-term health problems.

(vi) Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs):

Sexually Transmitted Diseases are a Major Health Issue Faced by Women:

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) such as AIDS are also a major health issue faced by women in Pakistan.

Rampant Sexual Contact Leads to STDs: This happens because of rampant sexual contact and without any contraceptive measures. This further aggravates when there is absence of a proper screening mechanism to diagnose the disease.

Frequency of Sexually Transmitted Infections is Great.

Globally more than a million sexually transmitted infections occur daily, and over 53,000 women aged 15 and over were living with HIV/AIDS in Pakistan by the year 2020, as per a research article posted by NIH.

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Reason for Prolonged Sexually Transmitted Disease:
One reason for prolonged sexually transmitted disease in women is the unavailability of nearby medical facilities as well as a lack of education and awareness.

Health Related Issues Throughout the Life Cycle:
Following are the health issues that a woman faces throughout her life, starting from birth till womanhood:

Stage of Woman's Life Cycle	Health Issues
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As a girl child

Malnutrition due to cultural discrimination in household resources.

As teenage girl:

Infection due to use of dirty cloth instead of sanitary pad (dax) during menstruation.

Stage of Woman's Health Issues with Cycle

As a Woman	Female infanticide, abortion, ultrasonic confirmation of gender, breast cancer, cervical cancer, and ovarian cancer.
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Measures to be Taken to Improve Women's Status as a Whole:

Owing to all the above mentioned health issues faced by women, there is a dire need to take effective steps in order to improve women's status as a whole.

(i) Free Emergency Centres and Maternity Homes should be established. There is a dire need to establish free emergency centres and maternity homes, especially in rural areas. Moreover, these emergency centres must provide service 24/7. Also, there must be free emergency obstetric care units (Emoc).

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- (ii) Skilled Midwives should be Appointed: There must be long-term planning to produce an army of competent and skilled midwives to reduce the maternal death rate. There are many nursing homes established in various cities of Pakistan that tend to produce skilled nurses, but there should be the same facility to produce skilled midwives.
- (iii) Investment in Health Sector should be increased: Right now, the health sector of Pakistan constitutes 2 percent of the overall GDP. The budget needs to be increased so that the maximum can be spent to improve health conditions in the country.
- (iv) Awareness Programs about Health Issues should be held: NGOs and educational institutions should take responsibility to hold awareness programs in order to aware young girls. Moreover, NGOs

should organize similar programs in far-flung areas to educate rural women so that they may reach out to experts after experiencing symptoms.

(v) Women's Health Laws should be revised. Although section 338(A) of the Pakistan Penal Code allows abortion under specific conditions mentioned in the provision, it must be revised keeping in view the Islamic restrictions as well as the medical needs. Domestic Violence and Forced Pregnancy Must Not be Ignored. Also, the factors of domestic violence and forced pregnancy must not be ignored and should be made a necessary condition of abortion to avoid infanticide.

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Conclusion: The health status of women in Pakistan is not in good shape. It has been mixed by various causes such as patriarchal mindsets, cultural discrimination, complications in pre and post-pregnancy and issues faced by women living in rural areas such as that of non-access to medical facilities and screening centres etc. Therefore there is a dire need for effective measures to improve the status of women as a whole and not just their health. The above mentioned measures can play a vital role in improving health standards for women in Pakistan.