

Q:- Discuss women's health issues in context with Pakistan's social, cultural and demographic situation.

1) Introduction:-

Women's health in Pakistan is shaped by a range of socio-cultural and demographic factors that hinder access to the adequate care. High maternal mortality, largely due to a limited access to skilled birth attendants and prenatal care, remains a major concern. Women, particularly in rural areas, face a lot of barriers to reproductive health services. Malnutrition, anemia and mental health issues like depression are widespread, exacerbated by gender and inequality. Additionally, gender-based violence, including domestic abuse and honor-killing contribute to both physical and psychological trauma, further limiting women's well-being. These all challenges are compounded by an

underfunded healthcare systems and a lack of female healthcare providers in many areas of Pakistan.

2) Women's health issues in Pakistan-

Here are some health issues of women in Pakistan in the context of the country's social, cultural and demographic situations:-

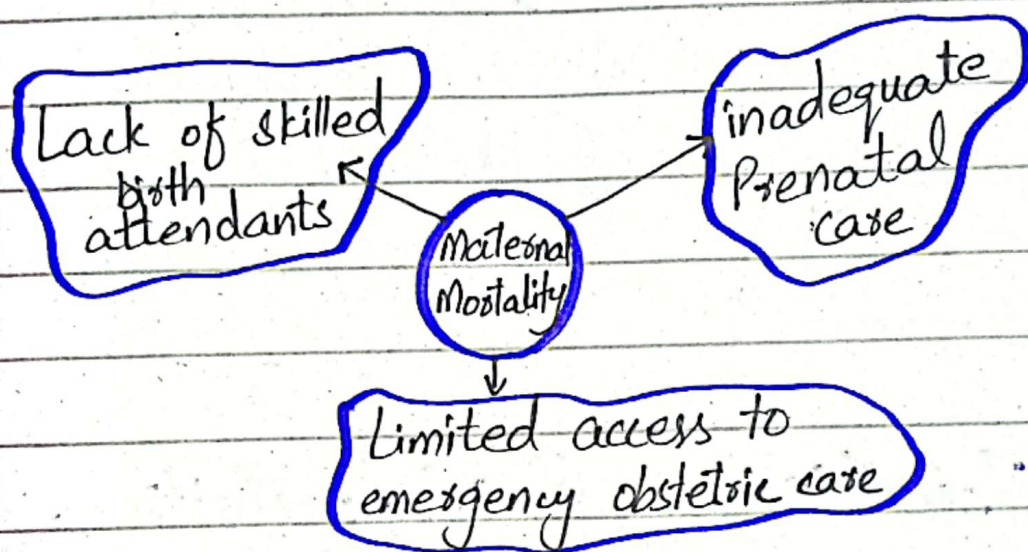
i) Maternal health & Child-birth complications:-

- High maternal Mortality Rate
- Home - Births
- Early Marriages & child bearing

a) High maternal mortality rate:-
Pakistan has one of the highest

maternal mortality rates in the world. According to the World Bank, Pakistan's maternal mortality rate in 2020 was 154 deaths per 100,000 live births.

Factors responsible for high maternal mortality rate:-



b) Home Births:-

A significant percentage of births occur at home, often without skilled medical professionals. This increases the risk of complications during childbirth. The home birth-rate of Pakistan was recorded **29%** in **2019**. This practice is still common in Pakistan.

c) Early Marriages and Child Bearing:-

Early marriage and adolescent pregnancies, common in some rural areas, also contribute to poor maternal health outcomes. The median age of marriage for women in Pakistan is about 20 and teenage pregnancy rates are relatively high, with many young girls becoming mothers before their bodies are fully prepared.

ii) Nutrition and Malnutrition:-

Anemia and Malnutrition

Limited Access to Nutritional Food

a) Anemia and Malnutrition:-

A significant number of women in Pakistan suffer from anemia, primarily due to iron deficiency. The Pakistan Demographic and Health

Survey (PDHS) 2017-18 showed that around **50%** of women of the reproductive age are anemic. Malnutrition, especially in rural areas, contributes to poor health outcomes, including complications during pregnancy and childbirths.

b) Limited Access to Nutritional Food :-

Socio-economic disparities mean that many women, particularly in rural areas, do not have access to the sufficient nutritious food. According to a report by **DAWN** newspaper, "poor nutrition among women, especially those of reproductive age, is a significant public health concern, with many women suffering from malnutrition, anemia and vitamin deficiencies."

iii) Mental Health Issues :-

Depression
& Anxiety

Postpartum
Depression

a) Depression & Anxiety:-

Mental health issues, including depression and anxiety, are prevalent among women in Pakistan. According to World Health Organization's World Mental Health Report 2022:-

"Depression is one of the most common mental health disorders in Pakistan, affecting approximately 34% of the population."

Cultural norms discourage women from openly discussing mental health issues, leading many to suffer in silence.

b) Postpartum depression:-

Postpartum depression is another significant issue, but the lack of awareness and stigma around mental health make it difficult for women to seek help. A 2023 study published in the Journal of Affective Disorders found that about 15-20% of women in Pakistan experience postpartum depression.

iv) Physical and Sexual Abuse:-

Gender-based violence is a major health concern in Pakistan. Women are often victims of domestic violence, rape and honor killings. According to a report from Ausat Foundation:-

"around 70-80% of women in Pakistan experience some form of domestic violence, which has direct link to mental health issues."

v) Diseases of Cancer:-

Different types of cancer are widespread among women but most common types are breast cancer and cervical cancer. Breast cancer is diagnosed mostly at advanced stages due to lack of awareness and screening programs. According to WHO:-

"Breast cancer accounts for approximately 30% of all cancers diagnosed in women in Pakistan."

Cervical cancer is also significant health

problem for women in Pakistan. It has one of the highest rates of cervical cancer in the world.

vi) Gender Roles and Inequality-

Cultural and societal norms in Pakistan often place women in subordinate roles, limiting their decision-making power, including in health-related matters.

e.g. many women need permission from their husbands or male guardians to seek medical care, and this can delay or prevent access to timely treatment.

3) Conclusion:-

The health of women in Pakistan is influenced by social, cultural and demographic factors that create barriers to accessing proper healthcare. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach to improve overall health and well-being of women in Pakistan.