

## Maternal Health Challenges in Pakistan: Addressing a Crucial Concern



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### Abstract

This article underscores the pivotal role that maternal health plays in shaping Pakistan's overall well-being and developmental trajectory. The narrative elucidates the persisting challenges that hinder advancements in maternal health, consequently contributing to elevated maternal mortality rates, perpetuation of poverty cycles, and imposition of societal constraints. The elevated maternal mortality ratio coupled with deficiencies in healthcare services accentuates concerns regarding accessibility and quality. Maternal malnutrition, deeply entrenched in poverty and cultural norms, further exacerbates complications. The inadequacies in rural healthcare infrastructure act as impediments to timely access to care. Compounding these challenges are adolescent pregnancies, which heighten risks due to physiological immaturity. Addressing these multifaceted issues necessitates a comprehensive strategy encompassing enhancements in healthcare infrastructure, nutritional interventions, educational initiatives, policy reforms, and heightened cultural awareness. Vital components of this strategy involve promoting female education, combating early marriages, empowering women in decision-making processes, bolstering family planning services, and ensuring effective policy implementation. The realization of improved maternal health outcomes in Pakistan hinges upon the successful execution of these measures.

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Maternal health is a vital indicator of a nation's overall well-being and progress. However, in Pakistan, several significant challenges continue to hinder the improvement of maternal health outcomes. These challenges not only jeopardize the lives of mothers but also contribute to the cycle of poverty and hinder social development. To make meaningful strides in addressing maternal health challenges, a comprehensive approach is required, encompassing healthcare infrastructure enhancement, education, and policy reform (1,2).

Pakistan's maternal mortality ratio remains alarmingly high, with an estimated 276 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, as per the World Bank data. This indicates a glaring inadequacy in the accessibility and quality of maternal healthcare services across the country. Factors contributing to this challenge include inadequate skilled birth attendants, limited access to emergency obstetric care, and cultural barriers preventing women from seeking timely medical assistance (1).

Maternal malnutrition stands as a pressing concern in Pakistan, casting a shadow over maternal health outcomes across the country. The lack of adequate nutrition among pregnant women contributes to a myriad of adverse consequences for both mothers and their infants. The issue is multifaceted, stemming from factors such as limited dietary diversity, iron and folate deficiencies, and prevailing anemia. These nutritional inadequacies often arise from poverty

and food insecurity, where families' limited resources hinder access to nutrient-rich foods. Adolescent pregnancies further compound the challenge, as young mothers experience nutritional competition between their own growth and that of their developing fetus. The lack of education and cultural norms also play significant roles, influencing dietary choices and limiting awareness about proper nutrition during pregnancy (3,4).

Insufficient healthcare infrastructure, especially in rural and remote areas, poses a significant hurdle. The lack of well-equipped health facilities and skilled healthcare professionals makes it challenging for women to access timely prenatal and postnatal care. This is exacerbated by the inadequate availability of essential medicines, medical equipment, and hygiene facilities. To overcome the maternal health challenges stemming from limited healthcare infrastructure, Pakistan must focus on expanding and strengthening its healthcare system. This involves investing in the establishment of well-equipped health facilities, increasing the number of skilled birth attendants, ensuring access to emergency obstetric care, and enhancing the availability of essential medical resources. Additionally, efforts to raise awareness about maternal health, especially in rural areas, can empower women to make informed decisions and seek appropriate care (7). Only through these comprehensive measures can Pakistan make significant progress in improving maternal health outcomes and ensuring the well-being of its mothers.

Pakistan has one of the highest rates of child marriages globally. Adolescent pregnancies come with heightened health risks for both mothers and their infants due to the underdeveloped physiological conditions of young mothers. Addressing early marriages and promoting educational opportunities for girls can help delay pregnancies, leading to improved maternal health outcomes. Addressing maternal health challenges arising from early marriages and adolescent pregnancies requires a comprehensive approach. This involves raising awareness about the risks of early pregnancies, promoting education, providing access to reproductive healthcare services, empowering young girls to make informed decisions, and challenging societal norms that perpetuate early marriages. Government policies, community engagement, and collaboration between healthcare providers and educational institutions are crucial for improving maternal health outcomes and ensuring the well-being of both adolescent mothers and their infants (3,7).

The correlation between a mother's education and maternal health outcomes is well-established. Women with limited education often lack awareness of proper maternal care practices and family planning options. Investing in female education not only empowers women but also positively impacts maternal and child health. By addressing the lack of education among women and girls, Pakistan can significantly improve maternal health outcomes, break cycles of poverty, and create a healthier and more prosperous future for its citizens (3).

Societal norms and customs often limit women's decision-making autonomy regarding their reproductive health. Women's ability to make choices related to family planning, childbirth, and seeking medical care is influenced by prevailing cultural beliefs. Raising awareness and engaging communities in discussions about the importance of maternal health can challenge harmful norms. By addressing socio-cultural norms that impact maternal health, Pakistan can foster an environment where women have greater autonomy, access to education, and the freedom to make informed choices regarding their reproductive health. This will lead to improved maternal well-being, healthier families, and a more progressive society.

The lack of access to family planning services contributes to unintended pregnancies and maternal health issues. Effective family planning services can help women space their pregnancies and make informed decisions about their reproductive health, reducing the strain on healthcare facilities. By addressing the challenges stemming from inadequate family planning services, Pakistan can make substantial progress in improving maternal health, reducing maternal mortality and morbidity rates, and creating healthier futures for mothers and their children (5).

Despite commitments to improve maternal health,

there are gaps in policy implementation and resource allocation. Strengthening healthcare systems, increasing funding for maternal health programs, and enforcing policies that ensure women's rights and access to healthcare are crucial steps that need to be taken.

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