

# Sexual and Reproductive Health in Pakistan: A Need for the Attention

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## Introduction

Awareness about sexual and reproductive health among adolescents is imperative. It is an essential aspect of the growth and development of adolescents that endorses the dignity of an individual's life [1]. However, large proportions of the adolescent population around the world face numerous reproductive and sexual health challenges. Among those problems, inadequate access to health-related knowledge, insufficient resources, and unreasonable gender-based principles and norms constitute as a major obstacle [2]. Though, sexual and reproductive health rights have been incorporated in the international health policy agenda since 1994 but still restricted access to SRH information is identified as a key barrier in developing countries including Pakistan [3]. Various factors significantly contribute to the restricted accessibility of SRH services. Early marriage culture, denial of contraceptive methods, usage, and rampant illiteracy create hurdles to easy access to SRH services [4].

Furthermore, strong adherence to religious doctrine and persistent cultural taboos shrinks the space of a conducive environment and leave little room for intelligent discussions to prevail in knowledge about such issues across the communities [5]. Thus, this creates misconceptions in the considerable segment of the population, which is evident from the fact that almost 63% of Pakistan's population faces difficulty in knowing about their Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) [6]. Furthermore, economic dependability, limited political participation, and lack of legal potential among women keep this crisis continuous. Currently, the annual report on the State of the World Population 2024, on the theme name 'Interwoven Lives', Threads of: Ending inequalities in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights presents shocking revelations which is indeed a matter of great concern for Pakistan. It highlights that only less than one in three women had the liberty to make any decision about her sexual and reproductive health. Further, it also stressed upon the fact about the vulnerability of physically challenged women. As they are on the verge of severe jeopardy to face gender-based violence. The insights represent the forecast that the country would take a further 93 years span of time to accomplish family planning needs, while the objective of zero maternal death would not be attainable for 122 years [7]. Such large numbers undoubtedly pose a daunting challenge and require considerable attention from the authorities to ensure safe birth facilities and inevitable sexual and reproductive health services.

Apart from it, there is a lacuna in several policy-making measures of Pakistan, that if addressed and reformed so timely solutions can be ensured. Such as healthcare services are usually reluctant to provide abortion or post abortion services which is often based on the personal beliefs of the providers. Thus, this compels women to seek to acquire the same services by other sub-standard methods which put their lives at huge risk. However, some positive policy-making measures are evident pertaining to ensuring safe abortion services such as 'The Service Delivery Standards Guidelines issued in 2015, which were further modified by the authorities in the year 2018, based on WHO guidelines that emphasize the adaptability and

expertise of the medical service providers to women and girls [8]. However, the issued guidelines lack legal leverage in the country, i.e., the accountability to adhere to those guidelines. In addition, most segments of the women population are unaware of it which could prevail awareness among them to seek the quality of the services they are entitled to have.

For matters to be better, the role of media is pivotal. Dissemination of crucial information and prevailing awareness about family planning would be constructive. It is also important for the authorities that they deploy female health personnel with the target of increasing contraceptive use in unprivileged and destitute communities [9]. Having sexual and reproductive health freedom is a fundamental right, as its absence is liable to erode communities and their resources and undermine the healthcare infrastructure. Therefore, formulating socio-economic and legislative reforms and making efforts to raise awareness of the SRHR would step in the right direction and pave the way for the betterment of policy-making and necessary reforms in the healthcare system [10].

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