

## 2. Women's Health

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### **Abstract:**

*We all agree with the statement "Health is wealth. It is quite true at all stages of life and for any gender. It doesn't matter whether the person is male or female, kids or adult. Health always remained important for everyone. We cannot enjoy a single moment of our life if we don't have good health. Good health is the strength of life and key to happiness.*

*Here we are talking about women health. Woman who is the creator of new life on the Earth, who is the care givers of the family members and for the last few decades playing very active role in nation building. She starts her days with new challenges and try to meet her demand selflessly. How can she confront her challenges with diseased mind and body? No, it is never possible. She cannot meet her household as well as professional responsibilities with poor health. She must be healthy physically, mentally emotionally and socially only then she will perform all responsibilities successfully. Good health empowers us and makes us strong mentally as well as physically.*

*In India, women constitute almost 50 per cent of the whole population. Can we imagine our nation as developed where half of the population are not healthy because health ultimately impacts the productivity of an individual and poor health of the population will reduce the productivity as well as put economic burden on the nation.*

*Good health is really a wealth for an individual as well as for the society or nation to whom he/she belongs to.*

**Keywords:** *Women, health, creator, care givers, productivity.*

### **2.1 Introduction:**

The term Health has been defined in many ways but, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) Health is "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of diseases and infirmity. It clearly mentions that health doesn't mean only free from diseases and infirmity but more than that, it doesn't include physical health only.

Our mental and social health also come under the domain of health. Healthy mind and social wellbeing of a person equally contribute to a healthy life. Good health is the key of happiness.

If a person is in good physical, mental and social health, he/she can use their potential at optimum level and meet challenges successfully. Health impacts the productivity of a person and country having healthy and happy population always do better development than a nation with diseased population.

Different renowned persons have their own views on importance of health and one of them is Mahatma Gandhi. He said "It is health that is real wealth and not pieces of gold and silver."

We have another quote of Michelle Obama first lady of USA. According to Michelle Obama "Communities and countries and ultimately the world are only as strong as the health of their women."

From the quote of Michelle Obama, we can understand the importance of women health because role of women is very wide and it is not confined to the family only. Women health doesn't affect her family but indirectly affects the society or nation as a whole.

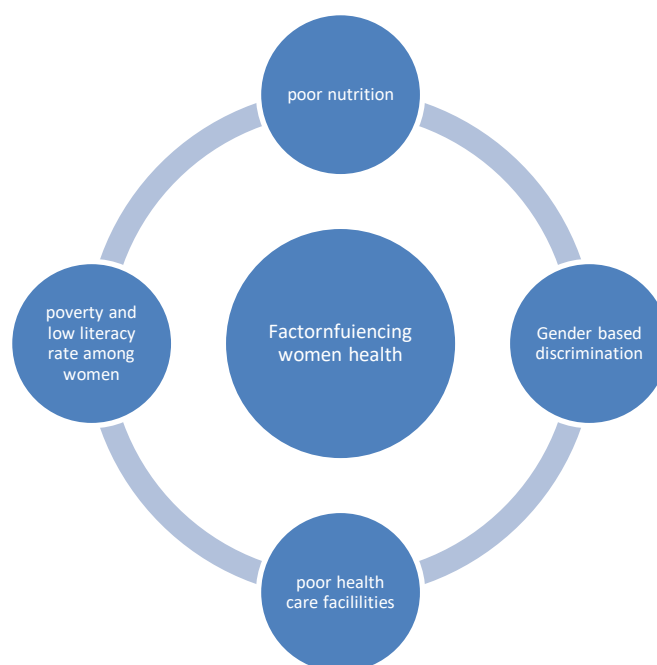
Women who constitute almost half of the Indian population are major stakeholders in development process of the nation and their health status means a lot. Women who are known as the care givers of the family, majority of household responsibilities lie on her shoulders at one hand but at the same time she has to struggle for her professional career. Every day she tries to make a balance between personal and professional life at household level. Journey of woman's life is full of responsibilities but get least co-operation at household level.

Most of the time we observe that when a female of the family is in good health and other member has some health issues it can be comparatively easy to handle the situation but the moment female or home maker gets sick or unwell, the whole family gets disturbed and the situation becomes very difficult. This may happen because a female possesses more patience and tolerance than a male. But, in spite of all these they are more vulnerable to many evil practices prevalent in the society which directly or indirectly impact their health adversely.

Health issues may be common for both sexes but their impact and severity may be different for both genders because of differences in physiological structure and psychological factors.

## **2.2 Factors Influencing Health Status of Women:**

Women health becomes matter of concern because they are vulnerable to poor nutrition in all phases of life, which doesn't impact their own growth and development but the next generation too. This is one of the most important reasons of low birth weight among the children. Poor nutritional status also increases risk of high maternal mortality rate and other complications among women. Malnourished mothers deliver children with low immunity and other nutritional deficiency disorders. Gender-based discrimination, early marriage, domestic violence, sexual abuse, illiteracy, unawareness and unhygienic practices during menstruation and access to quality healthcare, which pose a major concern because all these factors eventually cause a negative impact on her overall health.



**Figure 2.1: Factors Influencing Women Health**

Other factors are:

- Less employment
- Early marriage
- Social and cultural factors
- Early child bearing
- Domestic violence
- Sexual abuses
- Unsafe abortion
- Ignorance of women towards own health

These are the some determining factors responsible directly or indirectly for poor health status among half population in India.

### **2.3 Facts Based Information Related to Women Health:**

It is very unfortunate that vulnerability of women has been observed all over the world and it is very surprising findings that about 800 women die every day of preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth, and 20 per cent of these women are from India. Seven of the top 10 causes of death in women in India are NCDs, led by heart attacks, stroke and respiratory diseases.

India's anemia burden among women is widespread, with 53.1 per cent of non-pregnant women and 50.3 per cent of pregnant women being anemic where India carries the highest

burden of anemia despite having various programs and policies for the past 50 years, since the launch of National Nutritional Anemia Prophylaxis Programme in 1970 (NFHS-4 , 2016).

A quarter of women of reproductive age in India are undernourished, with a body mass index (BMI) of less than 18.5 kg/m (Source: NFHS 4 2015-16).

If we talk about micronutrient deficiencies, currently 80 per cent of adolescents suffer 'hidden hunger' due to micronutrient deficiencies. The trend is more prevalent in girls as they already suffer multiple nutritional deprivations.

Women in India live 2.7 years longer than men on average but the difference in healthy life expectancy between the two is just 0.1 years which indicates that women do not necessarily live a healthier lifestyle than men. This disparity, according to experts, is due to the lack of bodily autonomy and lack of resources that affect women's health. Social Norms and stigma around women's intimate health also play an important role in creating the gender gap.

India's ranking has slipped from 112 to 140 in terms of the gender gap since 2019. This indicates poor and inadequate healthcare conditions for marginalized women (Sharma, 2022).

There was another study of Tata-Cornell Institute for Agriculture and Nutrition which disclosed that during pandemic women's dietary diversity in India declined by 42.0 per cent because of less consumption of fruits, vegetables, and eggs.

Again, The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020 report revealed that in 2016, nearly 51.4 per cent of women of reproductive age in India were suffering from anemia.

Many researchers carried out during / post pandemic also documented that sudden emergence of pandemic impacted women health adversely.

**Akanksha Khullar & Kavya Sharma (2020) in their research discovered** that before the pandemic, consumption of diverse food groups among adolescents was low but , the fallout of Covid-19 has further worsened dietary diversity, especially among women, adolescents and children.

#### **Country Health and Survival Rank**

Indonesia 58  
Pakistan 119  
Bangladesh 122  
India 141

**Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2014,**

A study conducted by Emcure Pharmaceuticals in association with Ipsos Research Private Limited (Ipsos India) over 1000 working women aged between 25 to 55 years across seven cities of India in 2021 reveals that around half of the women surveyed are not comfortable talking about one or more women's health issues due to the prevalent societal taboo and stigmas associated with them.

Through this survey, women working in white-collar jobs shared details of stigmas they face related to health, and how it all leads to social pressures and professional issues.

The research report also documented that 86.0 per cent of working women observed their colleagues/relatives/friends drop out of the workforce, and 59.0 per cent of whom cited health issues as the main reason. Further, the study also revealed that 67.0 percent of working women said that talking about health issues was still considered to be taboo in the society.

The findings highlight that commonly occurring issues such as PCOS, breast cancer and endometriosis are still subject to taboo and stereotypes. This reflects the current state of women's health in India in a poor light.

Namita Thapar, Executive Director, Emcure Pharmaceuticals, says, "Despite the progress we have made in the corporate sector for involving women in the workforce, issues related to women's health are still associated with irrational taboos. The findings of our study reveal the persistence of misperceptions and illogical societal taboos related to women's health issues affecting even India's white-collar women across sectors."

#### **A. Programs run by the government to promote women health:**

Several schemes are being run by the government to promote overall health of women across the country like Anganwadi Services, Scheme for Adolescent Girls and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojna (PMMVY) under the Umbrella Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme. Anganwadi Services Scheme mainly aims to improve the nutritional and health status of pregnant women & lactating mothers and reduce the incidence of mortality, morbidity and malnutrition. Under the Scheme, pregnant women and lactating mothers are provided supplementary nutrition, nutrition and health education, immunization, health check-up and referral services.

Under Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) cash incentive is given to women to improve health seeking behaviour amongst pregnant and lactating mothers and to compensate partially the wage loss so that the woman can take adequate rest before and after delivery of the first child.

Recently in 2017 Government has launched POSHAN Abhiyaan. This POSHAN Abhiyaan aims to achieve improvement in nutritional status of adolescent girls, pregnant women and lactating mothers in a time bound manner.

The POSHAN Abhiyan has ambitious targets of reducing child stunting by 2% per annum and reducing anaemia in women and children by 3% per annum.

## **2.4 Conclusions:**

Health is wealth and is important for all of us. Since our society is very biased to women community and many evil practices are prevalent due to gender discrimination which directly or indirectly affect woman's health. Women who account for half of the total population and play key role in maintaining healthy families and society, her health cannot be overlooked.

Across woman's life span her health matters a lot not to herself but families, community and to the country and if ignored would lead to develop a number of different kind of problems. Healthy population is a big asset for any nation and they can contribute in nation building with their full potential.

## **2.5 Recommendations:**

- First of all, every woman must understand the importance of her own health and should not ignore this at any cost because she takes care of the whole family but most of the time she is reluctant to her own health.
- Girls or women must be made aware and educated regarding their rights and this can be helpful to protect them from being prey of many evil practices prevalent in the society.
- Government and non-government agencies are working for all wellbeing of women specially health but to some extent there is unawareness and ignorance at community Level which must be shorted out so that women themselves take benefits of the programs and scheme.
- Female healthcare providers can play an important role in educating society to recognize their health and nutrition needs as well. Empowering women at all levels would help them to serve as productive members of society and develop healthy generations.
- Nearly 14.0 per cent maternal death occurs globally due to unsafe abortion, which is very unfortunate and must be controlled through awareness and providing better health facilities to the women.
- Reproductive rights of women are some issues which are hardly. Awareness regarding contraception and catering to the unmet needs of family planning also needs attention to improve the quality of health.
- Providing economic security through employment opportunities for women will certainly create a positive impact on women's health concerns.
- Need for Dietary Diversity: Dietary diversity is a an effective way to rectify nutritional deficiency among adolescent girls and women and for this awareness is needed at mass level. This can be done if awareness programs are organized at school or college level.

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