



SEHAT CHECK



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—
A monthly roundup of
news articles on
women's health in
Pakistan

A Joint Project of



EDITOR'S NOTE

HELLO THERE!

On the occasion of World Population Day on the 11th of July, the spotlight turned to Pakistan's burgeoning population, a concern that demands urgent attention. With nearly 19,000 births daily, the country faces a gradual but intensifying crisis. This staggering birthrate yields a plethora of challenges, including strained healthcare systems, overburdened medical personnel, insufficient medical infrastructure, and an impending scarcity of resources for future generations. A sustainable remedy to this complex issue lies in embracing contraception and family planning, despite the prevailing societal resistance.

It is an undeniable truth that effective contraception and family planning are imperative to alleviate the soaring population growth. Yet, cultural norms and a lack of determined implementation often hinder progress. Paradoxically, while other Muslim-majority nations have succeeded in population control, Pakistan seemingly employs religion to encourage frequent childbirth. The time has come for the medical community and the government to collaboratively introduce well-considered birth control measures that prioritise the well-being of mothers. It's crucial to prevent a scenario akin to China's ill-fated One-Child Policy, especially considering the already substantial burdens faced by Pakistani mothers.



EDITOR'S NOTE

Balancing this equation also requires a consideration of the economic aspects. The willingness of Pakistanis to adopt beneficial practices significantly hinges on their perceived feasibility and convenience. Sadly, affordable contraceptives are scarce, and the availability of family counselors pales in comparison to the demand. Enabling communities to make positive changes necessitates practical solutions. Thus, the onus falls on doctors, healthcare organisations, and medical professionals to devise a comprehensive strategy for the successful execution of birth control initiatives. Concurrently, the government and authoritative figures must acknowledge the looming threat and proactively support these endeavours.

In essence, Pakistan's population challenge is a multifaceted predicament that warrants a multidimensional response. The path forward entails not only dispelling societal taboos and religious misconceptions but also ensuring that practical tools for family planning are accessible to all. By adopting an inclusive strategy that considers medical, social, and economic factors, Pakistan can pave the way for a more balanced and sustainable demographic future. This World Population Day should serve as a rallying point, urging all stakeholders to come together and collectively navigate a course toward a brighter, more manageable future.



WOMEN'S WELLNESS

Source:

Daily
Times

Date:

5-7-2023



BENAZIR NASHONUMA PROGRAM SERVES OVER 0.7M WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) has served over 770000 women and children under the Benazir Nashonuma initiative until now through provision of health and nutrition services. Among the total beneficiaries, a total of 38,2900 pregnant and lactating women (PLW) and 387400 children have been facilitated so far. According to an official source, these beneficiaries had been served through the network of over 488 Nashonuma Centers across the country. The Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) intervention of Benazir Nashonuma was designed in August 2020 to increase the uptake of Health and Nutrition services of its beneficiaries. The primary objectives of the program were to prevent stunting in children under two years of age, improve weight gain of pregnant women during pregnancy, reduce anemia and micronutrient deficiencies and prevent low birth weight. World Food Programme (WFP) is the lead implementing partner for Benazir Nashonuma which aims at addressing stunting among pregnant and lactating women (PLW) and their children less than two years of age through the provision of additional cash of Rs 2,000 per quarter per PLW and boy child and PKR 2,500/- per quarter per girl child of BISP beneficiary families.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Source:
Dawn

Date:
12-7-2023



ANAESTHETIST PERFORMS C-SECTION AT PRIVATE HOSPITAL

Due to the non-availability of a gynecologist, an anaesthetist allegedly performed a maternity operation in a private hospital in Bhalwal, resulting in the death of the baby in the womb and the mother being shifted to Dr Faisal Masood Teaching Hospital in critical condition. Reports said Syed Ali Rizvi, of Bhalwal, took his wife to Naveed Hospital, Bhalwal, for a delivery operation. The gynecologist was not available, but the hospital administration made the anaesthetist perform the maternity operation. Due to his alleged negligence, the newborn baby girl died. The aggrieved party staged a protest, and the police arrived at the spot and arrested anaesthetist Dr Naveed Aslam. The family members demanded that the caretaker chief minister seal such a greedy hospital and that legal action be taken against those responsible.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Source:
The News

Date:
14-7-2023



WB APPROVES \$100M FOR FAMILY PLANNING IN PUNJAB

The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors Thursday approved \$100 million for the Punjab Family Planning Programme to increase the utilisation of family planning services in Punjab, which is home to more than half of the country's population. The programme will provide timely access to quality family planning services free of charge, a handout from the lending institution said. The bank said it would also institutionalise quality of care across the family planning services delivery system. The programme will also support public information and advocacy campaigns so that more families are made aware of the benefits of family planning. "This important programme aims to achieve universal access to reproductive healthcare and to raise the usage of family planning methods in Punjab to 60% by 2030," said Najy Benhassine, World Bank Country Director for Pakistan. "This is critical for Pakistan's development, as excessive population growth rates hampers development, slows the accumulation of human capital, and contributes to keeping families in poverty." The program will scale up innovations, such as clinical franchising, voucher schemes, and family planning counseling through community leaders, which have been piloted in different districts of Punjab and have shown improvements in family planning outcomes.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Source:

Daily
Khabrain

Date:

16-7-2023



MOTHER AND CHILD'S HEALTH IS MOST IMPORTANT: DR MANZOOR HUSSAIN (TRANSLATION)

Bagh: District Health Officer Dr Manzoor Hussain has said that "a healthy mother and child are important to form a healthy society. Maternal and Child Health Week will be observed by District Health Office Bagh from July 17 to 22 in Bagh where 402 lady health workers will organise health sessions under supervision of 19 lady health supervisors. During the week, along with special measures for maternal and child care, awareness will be raised among the public in this regard." He was addressing the participants after the conclusion of a walk organised for maternal and child health. Deputy DEO Dr Mohsian Gardezi and Muhammad Rizwan said that like rest of Kashmir, Maternal and Child Health Week organised by Public Health Department, UNICEF, EPI and National Programme for Family Planning, will also be observed in Bagh.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Source:
Dawn

Date:
31-7-2023



GAP IN PREGNANCIES VITAL FOR MOTHER, CHILD HEALTH: MINISTER

Punjab Caretaker Minister for Primary and Secondary Healthcare and Population Welfare Punjab Dr Jamal Nasir on Tuesday said that 18 to 24 months gap in pregnancies vital for the health of mother, child and family. He stressed the need for effectively communicating this message in the society. Newly married couples should be registered online with the help of an effective advertising campaign and their counseling in this regard should be done. He said that all the district and tehsil offices of the Population Welfare Department should collect regular data on early age marriages in their areas and effective planning should be done to prevent it because early age marriage is very dangerous for the health of both mother and child. He was visiting the Rawalpindi District Office of Population Welfare Department. On this occasion, District Welfare Officer Rawalpindi Shireen Sukhan gave a briefing to the provincial minister. District officers of Population Welfare Department of other districts of Rawalpindi Division participated in the meeting. Dr Jamal Nasir said that the Department of Population Welfare should make an emergency schedule to convey this message at the grassroots level including the neglected sections of the society where there is no awareness regarding gap in the birth of children.

LACTATION



Source:
The News

Date:
8-7-2023

AZRA REFUSES TO MAKE CHANGES TO DRAFT BREASTFEEDING LAW

Not bowing to the pressure from the baby food industry, the Sindh health authorities have refused to make any amendments to the draft Sindh Protection and Promotion of Breast Feeding and Young Child Nutrition Act 2023, officials said on Friday. "Representatives of the baby food industry from multinational and local companies met Sindh Health Minister Dr Azra Pechuho the other day and tried to convince her to make changes in the draft of the Sindh Protection and Promotion of Breast Feeding and Young Child Nutrition Act 2023 but she turned down their proposals," an official of the health department told The News.

PAEDIATRIC CONCERNS

Hundreds of thousands of parents across Pakistan regularly buy breast milk substitutes to feed their children on the prescription and advice from their doctors, although they very well know that a child can survive solely on mother's feed for the first six months of their life. "A child's nutritional needs are adequately fulfilled by breastfeeding during the first six months of their life. They don't even need water during this period. This is called exclusive breastfeeding. Unfortunately, hardly 40 percent of women breastfeed their children in Pakistan due to a lack of awareness and unethical marketing practices by the formula milk companies", says Dr Mumtaz Ali Khan, senior technical officer at the National Institute of Health (NIH), Islamabad. A paediatrician by profession, Dr Khan, says despite religious directives regarding breastfeeding children for two years, many families waste valuable money on breast milk substitutes, which are not only hazardous for the health of children but also for the mothers. To discourage its growing use, some members of the Pakistan Pediatric Association (PPA) are trying to get formula milk declared a 'prescription medicine' that should only be sold at pharmacies and medical stores on the prescription of qualified physicians.

Source:
The News

Date:
9-7-2023

LACTATION

Source:

Express
Tribune

Date:

14-7-2023



SINDH PASSES BREASTFEED LAW

The Sindh Assembly on Thursday passed Sindh Protection and Promotion of Breast-Feeding and Young Child Nutrition Act, 2023 to ensure safe and adequate nutrition for infants and young children up to the age of 36 months. The bill moved by Parliamentary Secretary for Health Qasim Soomro said, “the law is aimed at protecting and supporting breastfeeding, and promoting healthy diets to prevent obesity and non-communicable diseases by regulating the marketing of designated products including breast milk substitutes, and of feeding bottles, valves, nipple shields, teats and pacifiers.” The law said, “no representative of the business shall be allowed to solicit healthcare facility, health professional and health worker to prescribe designated products to infants and young children.”

DISEASES & INJURIES

WOMAN DIES, HUNDREDS FALL SICK AS GASTROENTERITIS CASES RISE IN THE CITY

Source:
Dawn

Date:
5-7-2023

A woman died of gastroenteritis in a Malir village and hundreds of people across the city have fallen ill due to the infection over the past few days, it emerged on Tuesday. Health experts told Dawn that the situation seemed to have developed mainly due to the consumption of contaminated food and water coupled with the unhygienic conditions that were developed soon after animal slaughter was performed across the city during Eidul Azha. Sources said that the gravity of the situation could be gauged from the fact that over 4,200 patients had visited the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre (JPMC), Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital Karachi (CHK) and The Indus Hospital in less than a week and a village in district Malir was experiencing an outbreak of gastroenteritis. They said that the woman, in her 40s, reportedly died of gastroenteritis in Sheedi Goth, Malir, where a large number of patients reported at the Memon Goth Hospital with complaints of frequent loose motion and vomiting over the past few days.

BURNING OF BABY GIRL: ISLAMABAD HOSPITAL ASKED NOT TO PERFORM SURGICAL PROCEDURES

Taking action on burning of newly-born baby girl at a private health facility, Islamabad Healthcare Regulatory Authority (IHRA) has directed administration of the hospital not to perform any surgical procedures except in emergency cases till completion of investigation. An inspection team of IHRA visited the hospital at Lehtrar Road Wednesday in compliance of a complaint regarding a burn case of newborn in its Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), an official of IHRA told The News Thursday. "As our team found the story of the hospital staff unsatisfactory regarding the fire, the IHRA has directed the hospital administration not to perform surgical procedures till further orders", he said. The injured baby girl is currently under treatment at Children Hospital at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS), and doctors fear the child may lose part of her lower limbs due to complications of third-degree burns. The official said the said hospital is not registered with the healthcare regulatory authority.

Source:
The News

Date:
7-7-2023

DISEASES & INJURIES

IHRA CLOSES DOWN ICU OF HOSPITAL WHERE INFANT WAS BURNT

Source:
The News

Date:
8-7-2023

The Islamabad Healthcare Regulatory Authority (IHRA) Friday sealed the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) of a local hospital where a newborn girl had burnt. The IHRA has shifted the under-treatment patients to other health facilities, Authority officials said. "To ensure safety of new infants and patients, being admitted in the hospital, the IHRA has sealed the NICU of the hospital until completion of inquiry", IHRA Chief Executive Officer Dr Quaid Saeed told The News. The injured infant is under treatment at the Children Hospital at Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) Islamabad for third-degree burns. Doctors fear she may have to undergo amputation of lower limbs to save her life. The IHRA has already sealed the operation theatre of the hospital. With the closure of its Neonatal ICU, only Out-Patient Department (OPD) will remain functional, Dr Saeed said. Investigation is still underway to ascertain actual cause of incident in which the infant sustained third-degree burn injuries, he added.

MOTHER, CHILD DIE DURING WRONG OPERATION BY QUACK WOMAN (TRANSLATION)

A mother and her child have tragically lost their lives due to a botched procedure performed by an unlicensed practitioner in Jaranwala. The quack, identified as Noreen Kausar, advised the family to transfer the woman to Allied Hospital when her condition worsened following the incorrect surgery. Subsequently, Noreen Kausar and her staff managed to escape after urging the family to seek treatment at Allied Hospital. Reports indicate that the police arrived at the scene, took custody of the deceased bodies, and later apprehended the quack, Noreen Kausar. The grieving family has appealed to the Chief Minister of Punjab, the Health Minister, and the Chief Officer of Health to take decisive action against those accountable for this incident.



Source:
Daily
Khabrain

Date:
14-7-2023

DISEASES & INJURIES

AKU WORKSHOP ADDRESSES CERVICAL CANCER BURDEN IN PAKISTAN

Source:
Daily
Times

Date:
14-7-2023

The Aga Khan University in collaboration with the Centre for Women and Child Health at AKU and Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences (LUMHS) Hyderabad, held a workshop on the “Burden of Cervical Cancer” at Civil Hospital, Hyderabad. The aim was to raise awareness and promote prevention strategies for cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is a significant concern globally, ranking as the fourth leading cause of cancer-related deaths among women. However, developing, and low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) including Pakistan, bear a disproportionately higher burden of cervical cancer cases and deaths. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), cervical cancer mortality in LMICs is 18 times higher than in high-income countries. A recent study by the CITRIC Health Data Science Centre at AKU found that the incidence rate of cervical cancer among women in Pakistan is 7.6 per 100,000. This rate is higher than WHO’s target rate of 4 per 100,000 for cervical cancer elimination. These statistics call for national-level policy implementation focused on prevention and elimination strategies.

DOCTOR'S NEGLIGENCE, GYNAE PATIENT DIES AT LADY READING HOSPITAL (TRANSLATION)

A woman resident of Peshawar who was a gynae patient died as a result of the negligence of the doctors of Lady Reading Hospital, Peshawar, after struggling between life and death for two months. The woman's father-in-law Rees told media representatives that two months ago, a four-month old baby had died in his daughter-in-law's womb.



Source:
Daily
Khabrain

Date:
18-7-2023

DISEASES & INJURIES

Source:

Dawn

Date:

19-7-2023



THE STRENGTH WITHIN

In the lives of nations, the resilience of its peoples, if led through the halls of principle, can lead to tolerance, magnanimity, stability and democratic values. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, we have an uncharitable tendency to discount much of the suffering and the long-term trauma that ordinary individual citizens face. It would be accurate to say that the most ordinary of people lead, in the most ordinary of circumstances, the most extraordinary of lives. It is certainly most extraordinary of them to face up to a barrage of challenges such as terrorism, poverty, the worsening political and economic stability, testing their resilience in everyday life. One such challenge which silently gnaws at the heart of one in 10 menstruating women in the world is endometriosis. This disease which affects some 200 million women in the world literally eats into the very insides of a person and drains the physical and mental strength with which they face the world. Endometriosis is a condition where tissue similar to that found in the lining of the womb grows elsewhere in the body, such as on the ovaries and in the fallopian tubes. Symptoms can include lower abdomen or back pain, severe pain during periods, pain during intercourse, bowel and bladder symptoms, and fertility problems. The symptoms can vary for different women, with some more severely affected than others. Endometriosis can have a significant impact on some women's lives. It is a debilitating condition characterised primarily with intense pain with no cure. The level of pain can not only cause fainting in those living with endometriosis but also take a mental toll and can cause complete paralysis in social and domestic functioning. Yet, they are there, living, working, and existing with us in our homes, social spaces and workplaces.

HEALTHCARE WORKERS

Source:
Express
Tribune

Date:
31-7-2023



NURSES' SHORTAGE DERAILS PUBLIC HEALTHCARE

The tussle between medics seeking better remuneration abroad and the government showing an unwillingness to expedite the recruitment of newer nurses, has instigated a huge shortage of medics, leaving the lives of ailing patients to hang loosely in between. Where the weakened state of the economy has forced thousands of nurses to flee the country in search for better employment opportunities, the government's inability to replace the departing healthcare workers with newer recruits due to pending cases in court, has resulted in a severe shortage of nursing staff across hospitals in Sindh, depriving multitudes of patients of the right to dedicated medical attention. Jokhio, the attendant of a patient admitted in the Jinnah Hospital expressed his discontent at the level of neglect that patients in the hospital's wards had to endure. In all wards of this hospital, one nurse checks in on patients in the morning and then abandons them for hours until her next shift. Patients undergoing treatment abroad are given comprehensive care but unfortunately the situation in our country is starkly different," regretted Jokhio, who felt that the dire shortage of nursing staff was gravely hampering the treatment prospects of patients. According to the Sindh Health Department, 614 vacancies for nurses are empty in the province, while national estimates show that 1.3 million nurses are required across hospitals in the country. "The acute shortage of nurses has put extreme pressure on the limited nursing staff available, which has to single-handedly serve a large number of patients," said Sahar, a senior nurse at Jinnah Hospital, who further informed that only 260 nurses were serving the hospital which caters to thousands of patients.

WORLD POPULATION DAY

Source:
The Nation

Date:
11-7-2022



PAKISTAN'S POPULATION PROJECTED TO REACH 403M BY 2050

World Population Day has been celebrated all around the world on Tuesday and theme of this year's World Population Day is 'Unleashing the power of gender equality: Uplifting the voices of women and girls to unlock our world's infinite possibilities.' According to the surveys, population of Pakistan is currently estimated at 240.5 million and is projected to reach 403 million by 2050. Currently we are standing at 5th most populous country in the world. In Pakistan, almost 5.6 million children are born every year with an average of 3.6 children per woman. Total fertility rate (TFR) of 3.6 is the highest in South Asia. Why the fertility rates did not decline over the years? Due to universal marriage, low levels of contraceptive prevalence and even discontinuation of contraceptives among women. This has led to more unwanted pregnancies and as a result more mothers keep dying during child birth; almost 12,000 women per year. If the contraceptive use rises from 34% to 52% almost 6500 lives could be saved annually. The study also shows that 62 infants die before reaching 1 year of age (per 1000 live births) if contraceptive use rises 34% to 52% more than 140000 infants could be saved annually. Due to lack of family planning 17.3% infants are born unintended and on average couples in Pakistan have 1 unintended child. This also causes malnutrition among the infants. 40% of the children under the age of 5 have stunted growth in Pakistan, 18% of the infants are wasted and 29% of the infants are underweight. According to the study, girls are married at a younger age which increases high-risk pregnancies.

WORLD POPULATION DAY

Source:
Daily
Times

Date:
12-7-2022



GENDER EQUALITY MUST FOR A PROSPEROUS PAKISTAN: UNFPA

Pakistan is among the eight countries to account for half of the projected global population growth by 2050 with the country's population currently estimated at 240.5 million and is projected to reach a staggering 403 million by 2050, said UNFPA Pakistan Representative Dr. Luay Shabaneh. According to a press statement issued here on World Population Day by UNFPA, he said the country, as home to almost 3 percent of the global population, holds a significant role in shaping the future and well-being of humanity. He said the rapid population growth in Pakistan poses multifaceted challenges and opportunities adding while it presents immense human capital potential, harnessing this potential requires concerted efforts in ensuring gender equality, women empowerment, and access to quality education and healthcare. Women and girls must be at the heart of all efforts. He said that investing in women's health and education, addressing gender disparities, and providing economic opportunities are critical steps toward paving a path for a sustainable and prosperous future. He advised that empowering women through employment opportunities can harness their potential, with a rise in their participation in the labour market adding that this can further increase the labour absorption needs that is requiring for a substantial rise in economic growth.

WORLD POPULATION DAY

Source:
Express
Tribune

Date:
15-7-2022



PUNJAB MATERNAL DEATHS SPIKE

Punjab accounts for 5,200 of about 11,000 deaths of pregnant women recorded in the country annually. According to a fact sheet issued by Ann NGO, the Population Council, about 3,000 women pass away in Sindh during pregnancy, 1,900 in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and 400 in Balochistan in a year on average. The fact sheet issued on the World Population Day revealed that the fatality rate of pregnant women in South Asia was increasing, while Punjab was facing an alarming situation with the highest rate in the country. The relevant departments, universities and non-government organisations organised workshops, walks and other programmes to raise the issue of population and the threats faced by the country because of increase in it. The day this year focused on giving importance to girls along with women. The theme of the World Population Day was the 'Unleashing the power of gender equality: Uplifting the voices of women and girls to unlock our world's infinite possibilities'.

WORLD POPULATION DAY

Source:
The News

Date:
25-7-2022



THE POPULATION DENOMINATOR

Pakistan is the fifth most populous country in the world. From 34 million in 1950 to around 240.5 million today, our population is expected to rise to 403 million by 2050. This unfettered growth rate of 1.9 per cent per annum is unsustainable and far outstrips our economic growth rate, which is expected to be a mere 0.29 per cent next year. Even today, Pakistan is severely under-resourced. This will be exacerbated by further population explosion; 36.9 per cent of the population faces food insecurity, and 44 per cent of children under the age of five are stunted. While the annual demand for food production is increasing, Pakistan's water availability per capita is declining, pushing the country from a 'water-stressed' classification to a 'water-scarce' classification. Simultaneously, Pakistan's extreme vulnerability to climate disasters may further limit potential for food production, as evidenced by last year's devastating floods. These variables could have grave implications for food and energy security if population growth is left unchecked. Many factors have contributed to the population explosion – poverty, illiteracy, societal and social factors; therefore, the solutions are also multifaceted. While women's education, economic empowerment and societal change are essential, the role of health and population sectors in family planning is equally critical. However, after 60 years of investment in family planning, the contraceptive prevalence is a mere 34 per cent and the "unmet need for family planning" is 17 per cent amongst the highest in South Asia.

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Gender Watch

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