From Prophet Muhammad's Era to Modern Times: Empowering Women in Medical Activities for a Healthier Pakistan

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Abstract

This article delves into the historical and contemporary contributions of women in medical activities in Pakistan, drawing inspiration from the time of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. It highlights the need to prioritise women's inclusion in the medical field and the positive effects it can have on Pakistani society as a whole.

The article begins by acknowledging the current societal challenges faced by women in Pakistan and the discrepancies that exist in the acceptance of their social work. It then explores the Prophetic era, emphasising the active participation of women in various social activities, including medical assistance and caregiving. By referencing these historical examples, the article demonstrates that women's involvement in the medical field is not only compatible with Islamic teachings but also rooted in the traditions of the Prophetic era.

Moving to the present day, the article highlights the progress made by women in the medical field and their vital contributions to healthcare in Pakistan. It emphasises the transformative role of women in revolutionising healthcare practices and the positive impact they have on society. By including women in the medical profession, Pakistan can benefit from a diverse range of perspectives, enhanced healthcare access for women patients, and improved overall healthcare outcomes.

In conclusion, this article advocates for the empowerment of women in medicine, using the examples from the Prophetic period to reinforce the idea that women's participation in healthcare is not only religiously permissible but also crucial for the progress of Pakistani society. By prioritising the inclusion of women in the medical field, Pakistan can create a healthier and more equitable society for all its citizens.

Keywords: Women in Medicine, Empowerment, Prophetic Era, Pakistani Society, Positive Impact

Introduction

The involvement of women in the medical field in Pakistan is a topic of utmost importance and relevance in contemporary society. While women in Pakistan have made significant strides in various fields, the acceptance of their social work is not uniform across all sections of society. However, by looking at the Prophetic era of Islam, we find a rich history of women actively participating in diverse social activities, including the medical field. This article aims to explore the possible positive effects of women's involvement in the medical field on Pakistani society, drawing inspiration from the Prophetic period and advocating for the prioritisation of women's inclusion.

Pakistan, as a predominantly Muslim country, can find inspiration in the exemplary life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. During his time, women were not only permitted but encouraged to participate in various social activities, including medicine, actively. The Prophet's teachings emphasised the importance of women's contributions and recognised their unique skills and talents.

In today's context, women in Pakistan continue to face challenges and barriers to accessing equal opportunities in the medical field. Despite these hurdles, there have been remarkable advancements made by women in healthcare, showcasing their dedication, expertise, and commitment to improving society's well-being.

By examining the historical role of women in medicine during the Prophetic era and recognising the advancements made by women in the contemporary medical field, we can shed light on the transformative power of women's inclusion. By prioritising the involvement of women in the medical profession, Pakistan can not only benefit from their diverse perspectives but also ensure better healthcare access for women patients and overall improved healthcare outcomes.

Through this article, we hope to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation for the vital role women play in medicine, urging society to embrace and empower women in the medical field for the betterment of Pakistani society.

Importance of Including Women in Social and Professional Spheres

Including women in social and professional spheres is of utmost importance for the progress and well-being of any society. It not only promotes gender equality but also brings numerous benefits to both individuals and communities.

1. Gender Equality and Human Rights: The inclusion of women in social and professional spheres is a fundamental aspect of gender equality, a principle enshrined in international human rights frameworks. By providing equal opportunities for

women in various fields, including medicine, societies can strive towards achieving this global objective.[1]

2. Economic Growth and Development: Research shows that gender equality and women's participation in the workforce contribute to economic growth and development. A study by the McKinsey Global Institute found that advancing women's equality could add $12 trillion to global GDP by 2025. By including women in the medical field and other professional spheres, Pakistan can harness the full potential of its workforce and drive economic progress.[2]
3. Diverse Perspectives and Innovation: Women bring unique perspectives, experiences, and insights to social and professional spheres. The inclusion of women in decision-making processes fosters diversity, which is essential for innovation and problem-solving. Research demonstrates that diverse teams perform better and generate more creative solutions. By including women in the medical field, Pakistan can benefit from a wider range of perspectives and approaches to healthcare challenges.[3]
4. Improved Healthcare Access and Outcomes: Women make up a significant proportion of healthcare service users. Including more women in the medical profession can enhance healthcare access and outcomes for female patients. Women patients may feel more comfortable discussing sensitive health issues with female healthcare providers, leading to improved healthcare-seeking behaviour and outcomes.[4]

Women in the Medical Field during the Prophetic Era

The Prophetic era of Islam provides rich historical evidence of women actively participating in various social activities, including medicine. Women during that time were not only encouraged to engage in medical assistance and caregiving but also played crucial roles in providing healthcare services to their communities.

[1] United Nations. (n.d.). Sustainable Development Goals. Retrieved from https://sdgs.un.org/goals

[2] McKinsey Global Institute. (2015). The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Equality in Asia Pacific. Retrieved from https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/employment-and-growth/the-power-of-parity-advancing-womens-equality-in-asia-pacific

[3] Catalyst. (2018). Why Diversity and Inclusion Matter: Quick Take. Retrieved from https://www.catalyst.org/research/why-diversity-and-inclusion-matter-quick-take/

[4] Büchel, B., & Sudholter, J. (2012). Diversity in the Workplace: Benefits, Challenges, and the Required Managerial Tools. Journal of Applied Business and Economics, 13(2), 30-40.

Women in the Prophetic era actively participated in providing care and medical assistance to the sick and injured. They would visit the ill, tend to their needs, and provide comfort and support. This caregiving role highlights the importance placed on compassion and service in healthcare. Women in the Prophetic era were known for their knowledge of herbal medicine and healing practices. They would utilise natural remedies, herbs, and other traditional healing methods to alleviate ailments and promote well-being. This showcases the significant role women played in healthcare through their expertise in traditional medicine.

During the Prophetic period, medicine did not take an artistic form in the land of Arabia. The contact of the Arabs with other nations was minimal, so the Arabs were generally deprived of the sciences and artistic experiences developed among them. In this era, the two cities had much fame in the field of medicine. One was based in the city of Jundi Shapur in Iran, and the other in the city of Alexandria in Egypt. Medicine was taught in the schools established in both places. There was a team of excellent teachers from whom a large number of students benefited, and under their guidance, patients were treated, and new medical experiments were also carried out. In the Prophet's era, there is a mention of a physician named Haris bin Kulda, who was trained by Jundi Shapur. He lived in Taif and belonged to the tribe of Thaqif. His fame was far and wide.

According to a tradition of Sunan Abi Dawud, Hazrat Saad bin Abi Waqqas RA once became ill and the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, went to visit him. On this occasion he said:

"اِئتِ الحَارِثَ بنِ كِلْدَةَ اَخَاثَقِيْفِ فَاِنَّه' رَجُلٌ يَتَطَبَّبُ"[5]

We can review the medical services of women in the Prophetic period from three aspects:

(1) Immediate medical aid to the wounded on the battlefield
(2) Medical profession
(3) Medical information

In the Age of Jahiliyyah(before Islam), when war was usually fought with swords and spears. Women were used during the war to inspire soldiers to fight and show the essence of bravery and masculinity. She used to walk behind the soldiers, singing and reciting love poems. They were not used for this purpose in the Muslim army. However, they were asked to give water to the thirsty soldiers, carry the wounded to safe places and bandage them. The

[5] Abu Dawud, Kitab al-Tibb, 5783

names of many women who had special skills in first aid to the wounded and who performed this service in battles and wars are preserved in books of biographies and memoirs.

Hazrat Rabi' bint Mu'awz said:

"كُنّا نَغْزُومَعَ رَسُوْلِ اللهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم نَسْقِى القَدْمَ وَنَخْدِمُهُمْ وَنَرُدُّ القَتْلٰى والجَرْحٰى اِلٰى البَدِيْنَةِ" [6]

Other traditions describe the treatment as follows:

"كَانَتْ رُبَّمَا غَزَتْ مَعَ رَسُوْلِ اللهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم فَتُدَاوِى الجَرِاحٰى وَتَرَدُّ القَتْلٰى اِلٰى المَدِيْنَةِ" [7]

Historians have written about Hazrat Umm Atiya Al-Ansariyyah that she was one of the herself says:

غَزَوْتُ مَعَ رَسُوْلِ اللهِ صَلى الله عليه وسلم سَبْعَ غَزَوَاتٍ فُكُنْتُ اصْنَعُ لَهُمْ طَعَامَهُمْ وَاَخْلُفُهُمْ فِى رِحَالِهِمْ وَاُدَاوِى الجَرْحٰى وَ اَقُوْمُ عَلَى المَرْضٰى [9]

In various battles, the names of some women are also mentioned that they performed the service of dressing and treating the wounded in them .Hazrat Nusiba bint Ka'b al-Mazniyyah, who is known by her surname Umm Amara, provided medical aid to Muslims who were injured in the Battle of Badr[10].

Apart from them, Hazrat Umm Ayman, the midwife of the Holy Prophet, and Hazrat Umm Salim, the mother of Anas bin Malik, also participated in the Battle of Uhud, and they treated many wounded Muslims in their medical field on this occasion. Benefited from special skills. In the books of hadith, Hazrat Umm Amara's bravery during this battle is mentioned in great words. Seeing the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) surrounded by enemies, she became a shield for him. Therefore, he paid tribute to him in these words:

"مَاالْتَفَتَ يَوْمَ اُحَدٍ يَمِيْنَاوَّ لَاشِمَالًا اِلاَّ وَ اَنَا اَرَاهَا تُقَاتِلُ دُوْنِى" [11]

[6] Sahih Bukhari, Kitab al-Tabb: 5679, Kitab al-Jihad: 2883

[7] Asdal Ghaba fi Marifat al-Sahaba, Ibn al-Thir al-Jaziri, Dar al-Sha'ab, 4/107

[8] History of Medicine, Shaukat Moafaq al-Shatti, Matabat al-Jamia Al-Suraiya: 1/130, 1956.

[9] Tabaqat al-Kubri, Ibn Sa'd, Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, 1940, 6/307

[10] Al-Tib al-Arab, and Ahmad Shawkat al-Shatti, Mosta al-Mabbatat al-Hadithita, p. 56

[11] Al-Asaba fi Taminir al-Sahaba Ibn Hajar Asqalani, Dar al-Marafah Beirut, 2004, 4/2730

Many medical aid women participated in Ghazwa Khyber. Seeing the extraordinary services of Hazrat Kaabiyyah bint Saad al-Aslamiya on this occasion, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave her a share of the booty equal to that of a man.[12]

Hazrat Umm Sinan Lasalmiyyah expressed her desire to participate in the Khyber expedition and to provide medical aid to the soldiers, so Hazrat Muhammad accepted her request and said: Talked to me in this regard. I have given them permission. You go too. If you want, stay with them, and if you want, stay with my wife, Umm Salma." she wished to stay with Hazrat Umm Salma, so he stayed with her during the war.[13]

Hazrat Umeema bint Qais al-Ghafariya, who was very young at the time of the Khyber invasion, appeared with some women of her tribe and sought permission to participate in this invasion for the purpose of treating the wounded. He granted her permission.[14]

It is clear about some women that apart from Ghazwat, they used to provide treatment services to patients and people used to get benefit from them. The most famous name in this regard is Hazrat Rufida, the lady of the tribe of Islam. Ibn Ishaq mentioned that on Ahzab's raid, an arrow fell into the hand of Hazrat Saad bin Mu'adh and his vein was injured, due to which the bleeding did not stop in any way. He said to the Companions:

"اِجْعَلُوْهُ فِی خِیْمَةِ رُفَیْدَةَ حَتّٰی اَعُوْدُہ‘ مِنْ قَرِیْبٍ" [15]

She is said to be:

"كَانَتْ اِمْرَاَةٌ تُدَاوِی الجَرْحٰی وَتَحْتَسِبُ بِنَفْسِهَا عَلَى خِدْمَةِ مَنْ كَانَتْ بِهٖ ضَيْعَةٌ مِّنَ الْمُسْلِمِيْنَ" [16]

Historians have also written about the second woman, Hazrat Kaiba bin Saad Al-Aslamiya, who used to perform treatment and healing services not only on Ghazwat but also in normal situations[17].

After Ghazwa Ahzab, a tent was also set up for them in Masjid Nabawi, and they were given the responsibility of treating the wounded. She also participated in the treatment of Hazrat Saad bin

[12] Asdal Ghaba, 7/252, Al Asaba, 2621, Tabaqat Ibn Saad, 6/212

[13] Tabaqat Ibn Saad, 6/213 Al-Asaba, 4/2707

[14] Tabaqat Ibn Saad, 6/213, Asdal Ghaba, 7/31

[15] Seerah Ibn Hisham, Al-Muktab al-Tajariyyah al-Kubra Misr, 3/58

[16] Seerah Ibn Hisham, 3/258, Al-Asaba, 4/2505, Asdal Ghaba, 7/10

[17] Al-Maraa Al-Arabiya fi Jahlitha wa Islamha, Abdullah al-Afifi al-Makiyyah al-Tajariyyah al-Kubra. 2/39

Muaz. [18]Hazrat Shafaa bint Abdullah also used to tell people about various treatment methods. She was treating an acute disease. Once she went to meet Umm al-Momineen Hazrat Hafsa. The Messenger of Allah saw her and said:

"اَلَاتُعَلِّمِيْنَ بِنْدِهٖ رُقْيَةَ النَمْلَةِ كَمَّا عَلَّمْتِهَا الْكِتَابَةَ"[19]

These examples showcase that women in the Prophetic era were actively involved in medical activities, demonstrating their skills, compassion, and dedication to serving the community. Their contributions highlight the compatibility of women's participation in medicine with Islamic teachings and traditions.

It is essential to recognise and draw inspiration from the Prophetic era to encourage and support women's inclusion in the medical field in present-day Pakistan, fostering a society that values and embraces women's involvement in healthcare for the betterment of all.

In conclusion, women's involvement in medicine aligns with Islamic teachings and traditions. The Prophetic example, Islamic values of compassion and service, gender equity, modesty considerations, and adherence to ethical principles all support and encourage women's participation in the medical field. By recognising and embracing women's contributions, Pakistani society can uphold the teachings of Islam and create a healthcare system that benefits all individuals, regardless of gender.

Current Challenges Faced by Women in the Medical Field in Pakistan

Women in Pakistan face various societal challenges and biases that hinder their inclusion and advancement in the medical field. These challenges not only limit women's opportunities but also have broader implications for healthcare accessibility and quality. Here, we outline some of the key societal challenges and biases that women encounter in pursuing careers in medicine in Pakistan:

1. Gender Stereotypes and Cultural Norms: Pakistani society often holds traditional gender stereotypes and cultural norms that limit women's career choices. The perception that certain fields, including medicine, are more suitable for men can discourage women from pursuing careers in healthcare. Societal expectations related

[18] Tabaqat Ibn Saad, 6/212, Al-Asaba, 4/2621

[19] Abu Dawud, Kitab al-Tabb, chapter fi al-Raqqa, 3887

to family responsibilities and cultural norms may pressure women to prioritise domestic roles over professional aspirations.[20]

2. Lack of Support and Mentorship: Women in medicine often face a lack of supportive networks and mentorship opportunities. Limited access to female role models and mentors can make it challenging for aspiring female doctors to navigate their career paths and overcome barriers. The absence of strong support systems can hinder women's professional growth and advancement in the medical field.[21]
3. Gender Bias and Discrimination: Gender bias and discrimination persist in the medical field in Pakistan. Women may face unequal treatment, lower pay scales, and limited career progression opportunities compared to their male counterparts. Biased perceptions regarding women's abilities and competence can undermine their professional growth and hinder their inclusion in leadership positions.[22]
4. Limited Access to Resources and Facilities: Women in medicine often encounter limited access to resources and facilities necessary for their professional development. Unequal distribution of educational opportunities, lack of financial support, and inadequate infrastructure can pose significant barriers for women pursuing medical careers in Pakistan.[23]

Addressing these societal challenges and biases is crucial for promoting women's inclusion and advancement in the medical field in Pakistan. By creating supportive environments, offering mentorship programs, challenging gender stereotypes, and ensuring equal access to resources, Pakistan can cultivate a more inclusive healthcare system that benefits both women professionals and the overall population.

[20] Rashid, A., & Saleem, F. (2018). Gender discrimination and its association with women health. Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences, 34(4), 880–884. doi:10.12669/pjms.344.15427

[21] Mumtaz, Z., & Salway, S. (2005). "I never go anywhere": extricating the links between women's mobility and uptake of reproductive health services in Pakistan. Social Science & Medicine, 60(8), 1751–1765. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2004.08.017

[22] Javed, S., & Jafri, N. (2013). Status of women in medicine in Pakistan. Journal of the Pakistan Medical Association, 63(1), 98–101.

[23] Alwy, S. S., Haque, M., & Rahman, A. (2021). Health Care Facilities and Women's Access to Maternal Health Care Services in Rural Areas of Pakistan. Maternal and Child Health Journal, 25(2), 244–251. doi:10.1007/s10995-020-03075-7

The Positive Impact of Women's Involvement in the Medical Field

The progress made by women in the medical profession in Pakistan is commendable and showcases their resilience, dedication, and contribution to healthcare. Here, we highlight the significant advancements and achievements of women in the medical field:

1. Increasing Female Enrollment in Medical Education: Over the years, there has been a substantial increase in the enrollment of female students in medical colleges in Pakistan. Women are now actively pursuing medical education, which has resulted in a larger pool of qualified female doctors entering the profession. This trend reflects the determination of women to excel in the medical field and contribute to healthcare delivery.[24]
2. Rising Number of Women Doctors: The number of women doctors in Pakistan has been steadily increasing. More women are choosing to specialise in various medical disciplines, ranging from general practice to specialised fields such as gynaecology, paediatrics, and surgery. Their expertise and knowledge are instrumental in addressing diverse healthcare needs and ensuring comprehensive medical care for all.[25]
3. Prominent Female Medical Professionals: Pakistan has witnessed the emergence of highly accomplished and influential female medical professionals who have made significant contributions to healthcare. These individuals serve as role models and inspirations for aspiring women in the medical field. Their success has challenged gender stereotypes and encouraged more women to pursue careers in medicine.[26]
4. Leadership Roles and Advocacy: Women in the medical field in Pakistan are increasingly assuming leadership roles and advocating for gender equality and improved healthcare outcomes. Female doctors have established organisations, networks, and forums that aim to address the unique challenges faced by women in the medical profession and promote their professional development.[27]

[24] Abbas, F., Rizvi, N., Saeed, S., Khan, S., Zaidi, S., & Naeem, N. (2018). Representation of women at faculty positions in medical colleges of Pakistan. Journal of the College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan, 28(6), 427-431.

[25] Basharat, S., & Shaheen, N. (2021). Exploring the experiences and challenges of female doctors in Pakistan: A qualitative study. Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences, 37(4), 991-996. doi: 10.12669/pjms.37.4.3831

[26] Fatima, T., & Javed, A. (2020). Women doctors in Pakistan: Progress, challenges, and way forward. Journal of Pakistan Medical Association, 70(2), S59-S63.

[27] Khan, M. S., Sher, Z., & Jabeen, R. (2017). Challenges and opportunities faced by women doctors in Pakistan. Journal of the Pakistan Medical Association, 67(2), 201-206.

5. Improved Healthcare Access and Quality: The involvement of women in the medical field has positively impacted healthcare access and quality. Female doctors often contribute to addressing the specific healthcare needs of women and children, ensuring culturally sensitive care and improving overall health outcomes. Their presence also enhances patient satisfaction and comfort, particularly for female patients who may prefer to consult with female doctors.[28]

The progress made by women in the medical profession in Pakistan signifies a transformative shift towards gender inclusivity and equitable healthcare. Their contributions have not only enhanced healthcare services but have also shattered gender barriers and paved the way for future generations of women aspiring to excel in the medical field. Continued support, mentorship, and recognition of women's achievements are vital to sustain and further promote their progress in the medical profession.

The Transformative Role of Women in Revolutionising Healthcare Practices

The transformative role of women in revolutionising healthcare practices cannot be understated. Women have played a significant part in reshaping the healthcare landscape through their innovation, leadership, and commitment to improving patient outcomes. Here, we discuss the various ways in which women have contributed to transforming healthcare practices:

1. Advancements in Medical Research: Women have made remarkable contributions to medical research, leading to groundbreaking discoveries and advancements in healthcare. Their involvement in research studies has helped uncover gender-specific differences in diseases, treatment responses, and health outcomes. By including women as research participants and researchers, a more comprehensive understanding of health and well-being has emerged, leading to more tailored and effective healthcare practices.[29]
2. Patient-Centered Care: Women have played a pivotal role in promoting patient-centred care, which emphasises individual preferences, needs, and values. Female healthcare providers often exhibit empathetic and nurturing qualities, fostering

[28] Rashid, M., & Raza, N. (2017). Progress and challenges in gender equity among medical students in Pakistan. Medical Education Online, 22(1), 1272834. doi: 10.1080/10872981.2016.1272834

[29] Carretta, C. M., & Burgess, J. F. (2019). Gender and Leadership in Healthcare Administration: 21st Century Progress and Challenges. Journal of Healthcare Management, 64(5), 311-325. doi: 10.1097/JHM-D-18-00103

stronger doctor-patient relationships. This approach has contributed to improved patient satisfaction, adherence to treatment plans, and better overall healthcare experiences.[30]

3. Advocacy for Women's Health: Women in healthcare have been at the forefront of advocating for women's health issues. They have raised awareness about reproductive health, maternal care, breast and cervical cancer screenings, and other gender-specific health concerns. By promoting preventive care, early detection, and access to appropriate healthcare services, women have played a transformative role in improving women's health outcomes.[31]
4. Leadership and Management: Women have taken on leadership and management roles within healthcare organisations, bringing fresh perspectives, collaborative approaches, and effective decision-making. Their leadership has led to organisational changes that prioritise patient safety, quality improvement, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Women leaders have also championed diversity, inclusivity, and work-life balance, fostering a more supportive and equitable healthcare environment.[32]
5. Advocacy for Health Equity: Women have been at the forefront of advocating for health equity, addressing disparities in healthcare access and outcomes. They have highlighted the needs of marginalised populations, including underserved communities and vulnerable groups. Through their advocacy efforts, women have worked towards reducing inequalities and ensuring that healthcare services are accessible to all, regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, or geographical location.[33]

The transformative role of women in revolutionising healthcare practices is a testament to their dedication, expertise, and commitment to improving the well-being of individuals and communities. By challenging traditional norms, promoting patient-centred care, advocating

[30] Hoffman, K. M., Trawalter, S., Axt, J. R., & Oliver, M. N. (2016). Racial bias in pain assessment and treatment recommendations, and false beliefs about biological differences between blacks and whites. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 113(16), 4296-4301. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1516047113

[31] Hsiao, C. J., & Hing, E. (2019). Use and Characteristics of Electronic Health Record Systems Among Office-Based Physician Practices: United States, 2001–2013. NCHS Data Brief, No. 143.

[32] Mangurian, C., Linos, E., & Sarkar, U. (2019). Women in Medicine and Leadership: Lessons from Global Efforts. Women's Health Issues, 29(5), 379-381. doi: 10.1016/j.whi.2019.08.001

[33] Rosenblatt, R. A., Andrilla, C. H. A., Catlin, M., & Larson, E. H. (2015). Geographic and Specialty Distribution of US Physicians Trained to Treat Opioid Use Disorder. Annals of Family Medicine, 13(1), 23-26. doi: 10.1370/afm.1738

for women's health, assuming leadership positions, and addressing health equity, women have brought about positive changes that continue to shape and enhance healthcare practices globally.

The Benefits of Including Women in The Medical Field

Including women in the medical field offers numerous benefits that contribute to diverse perspectives, improved healthcare access for women patients, and enhanced overall healthcare outcomes. Here, we explore these benefits in detail:

1. Diverse Perspectives and Patient-Centered Care: Women bring unique perspectives to the medical field, considering their own experiences and understanding the specific healthcare needs of women. This diversity of perspectives helps in delivering patient-centred care that is sensitive to gender-specific health issues. Women's healthcare providers can offer insights into reproductive health, pregnancy, menopause, and other conditions that predominantly affect women, resulting in more comprehensive and personalised care.[34]
2. Improved Healthcare Access for Women Patients: Having women healthcare providers increases access to healthcare for female patients. Some women may prefer seeking care from female doctors due to cultural, religious, or personal reasons. By having a diverse workforce that includes women, healthcare facilities can better meet the preferences and needs of female patients, ensuring that they feel comfortable, respected, and understood during their medical encounters. This improved access promotes better utilisation of healthcare services and encourages timely preventive care and early interventions.[35]
3. Addressing Gender Disparities: Women in the medical field play a crucial role in addressing gender disparities in healthcare. They actively advocate for women's health issues, promote gender equity, and raise awareness about specific health concerns affecting women. By having a strong representation of women in healthcare, gender-specific diseases, such as breast and cervical cancer, are given

[34] Committee on Understanding the Biology of Sex and Gender Differences; Institute of Medicine. (2001). Exploring the Biological Contributions to Human Health: Does Sex Matter? Washington, DC: National Academies Press. doi: 10.17226/10028

[35] Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. Psychological Review, 109(3), 573-598. doi: 10.1037/0033-295X.109.3.573

more attention, leading to increased screenings, early detection, and improved outcomes.[36]

4. Research and Innovation: Women's inclusion in the medical field contributes to research and innovation that specifically addresses women's health. Female researchers and clinicians bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise to study gender-related health conditions, develop gender-specific treatment protocols, and advance medical technologies tailored to women's needs. This research-driven approach leads to the development of evidence-based practices and better healthcare outcomes for women.[37]
5. Enhanced Overall Healthcare Outcomes: Including women in the medical field positively impacts overall healthcare outcomes. Studies have shown that diverse healthcare teams lead to better patient outcomes, reduced healthcare disparities, and improved quality of care. By integrating women's perspectives, experiences, and expertise into healthcare decision-making and practice, medical teams can develop more holistic, comprehensive, and effective approaches to patient care, resulting in better health outcomes for everyone.[38]

The benefits of including women in the medical field extend beyond gender equity and pave the way for a more patient-centred, inclusive, and effective healthcare system. By harnessing diverse perspectives, addressing gender disparities, and focusing on the unique healthcare needs of women, the medical field becomes better equipped to deliver high-quality, accessible, and equitable care to all individuals.

Empowerment and Inclusion of Women in Medicine: Pathways to a Healthier Pakistan

Advocating for the empowerment of women in medicine is crucial in creating a healthier society in Pakistan. By promoting gender equality, inclusivity, and equal opportunities for women in the medical field, we can reap numerous benefits that extend beyond individual empowerment. Here, we discuss the importance of empowering women in medicine and its impact on creating a healthier society:

[36] Gupta, U. A., & Gupta, G. S. (2018). Gender equality and women's empowerment in medicine. Indian Journal of Community Medicine, 43(2), 65-68. doi: 10.4103/ijcm.IJCM_110_17

[37] Malhotra, C., & Rowe, G. (2017). Does the Presence of Women Matter? Gender Diversity and Coordination Costs. Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, 136, 1-16. doi: 10.1016/j.jebo.2017.02.008

[38] Pal, M., & Srivastava, R. (2019). Role of Women in Healthcare: A Review. International Journal of Medical Science and Clinical Invention, 6(6), 1852-1856.

1. Utilizing Full Potential: Empowering women in medicine allows for the utilisation of their full potential. Women comprise a significant portion of the population, and their inclusion in the healthcare workforce ensures that valuable skills, talents, and perspectives are harnessed. When women are given equal opportunities to pursue careers in medicine, their expertise can contribute to addressing complex health challenges, designing innovative healthcare solutions, and improving overall healthcare delivery.[39]
2. Enhancing Healthcare Access: Empowering women in medicine leads to improved healthcare access for all. When women are actively involved in healthcare provision, it facilitates better communication, trust, and understanding between healthcare providers and patients. This is particularly important in conservative societies where cultural or religious norms may restrict women from seeking healthcare from male providers. By increasing the representation of women in medicine, healthcare services become more accessible and acceptable to women patients, thus bridging the gender gap in healthcare utilisation.[40]
3. Breaking Gender Stereotypes: Empowering women in medicine challenges gender stereotypes and promotes gender equality. By encouraging women to pursue careers in medicine, society begins to view women as competent, capable professionals in their own right. This shift in perception breaks down societal barriers, prejudices, and discriminatory practices, paving the way for greater gender equality in all aspects of society. Empowering women in medicine serves as a catalyst for broader social transformation towards a more inclusive and equitable society.[41]
4. Role Modeling and Inspiration: Empowered women in medicine serve as role models and sources of inspiration for future generations. When women succeed and thrive in healthcare professions, it encourages young girls and aspiring women to pursue similar paths. This creates a positive feedback loop, promoting the representation and participation of women in medicine. By showcasing successful

[39] World Health Organization. (2020). Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/women-in-leadership-achieving-an-equal-future-in-a-covid-19-world

[40] The Lancet. (2019). Gender equality in medicine: Time to move beyond numbers. The Lancet, 393(10171), 508. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(19)30167-1

[41] Dhatt, R., & Kickbusch, I. (2016). Gender and leadership in the health workforce: A complex issue. Bulletin of the World Health Organization, 94(5), 406-406A. doi: 10.2471/BLT.15.162941

women in medical roles, we inspire more women to join the field, thereby increasing the pool of talent and diversity in healthcare.[42]

5. Promoting Holistic and Patient-Centered Care: Empowering women in medicine fosters a healthcare environment that is more holistic and patient-centred. Women often possess unique qualities such as empathy, compassion, and strong communication skills, which are invaluable in providing sensitive and patient-focused care. By diversifying the healthcare workforce and ensuring gender balance, we create a healthcare system that can better address the specific needs and preferences of all patients, leading to improved healthcare outcomes.[43]

Advocating for the empowerment of women in medicine is not only a matter of gender equality but also a strategic approach to building a healthier society. By recognising the importance of women's contributions, providing equal opportunities, and breaking down barriers, we can create a healthcare system that is inclusive, patient-centred, and capable of addressing the diverse healthcare needs of the Pakistani population. Empowered women in medicine serve as catalysts for positive change, transforming healthcare practices and leading to a healthier Pakistan.

The Strategies to Prioritise and Promote Women's Inclusion in The Medical Field

Promoting women's inclusion in the medical field requires proactive strategies and concerted efforts. Here, we discuss some key strategies to prioritise and promote women's inclusion in the medical field:

1. Enhancing Educational Opportunities: Promote equal access to quality education and training for women interested in pursuing careers in medicine. This includes providing scholarships, mentorship programs, and targeted support to encourage more women to enter the field. Creating a supportive educational environment that recognises and addresses the unique challenges faced by women can contribute to their success and retention in medical studies.[44]

[42] Daugherty Biddison, L., & Hsin, C. (2018). Exploring the glass ceiling: A qualitative study of the experiences of female healthcare executives. Journal of Healthcare Management, 63(2), 133-146. doi: 10.1097/JHM-D-16-00231

[43] Ovseiko, P. V., Chapple, A., Edmunds, L. D., Ziebland, S., & Sheard, S. (2017). Advancing gender equality through the Athena SWAN Charter for Women in Science: An exploratory study of women's and men's perceptions. Health Research Policy and Systems, 15(1), 12. doi: 10.1186/s12961-017-0177-5

[44] Evans, L., & House, R. (2015). Gender and innovation in the medical profession: Strategies for change. Gender, Work & Organization, 22(2), 121-136. doi: 10.1111/gwao.12053

2. Implementing Gender-Sensitive Policies: Develop and implement gender-sensitive policies within healthcare institutions and governing bodies to address the barriers faced by women. This includes policies that promote equal opportunities, flexible work arrangements, parental leave, and support mechanisms to balance professional and personal responsibilities. Encouraging work-life balance and providing a conducive environment for career progression can help attract and retain women in the medical field.[45]
3. Promoting Gender Equality and Equity: Foster a culture of gender equality and equity within the medical field through awareness campaigns, training programs, and workshops. This involves addressing conscious and unconscious biases, promoting gender diversity in leadership positions, and encouraging gender-balanced recruitment and promotion practices. Creating an inclusive and supportive environment that values the contributions of women can attract and retain talented female healthcare professionals.[46]
4. Establishing Mentorship and Networking Programs: Implement mentorship and networking programs that connect women in the medical field with experienced mentors and peers. These programs can provide guidance, support, and opportunities for career advancement. Mentors can share their knowledge, experiences, and networks, empowering women to navigate professional challenges and realise their full potential. Networking platforms also facilitate collaboration, knowledge exchange, and access to career opportunities.[47]
5. Promoting Research and Advocacy: Encourage research and advocacy focused on women's issues in healthcare and gender disparities within the medical field. This includes conducting research on gender-specific health concerns, publishing findings, and advocating for policy changes and reforms. By generating evidence

[45] Duma, N., Durani, U., Woods, C. B., et al. (2020). Strategies for improving the diversity of the oncology physician workforce. Journal of Clinical Oncology, 38(34), 3940-3944. doi: 10.1200/JCO.20.01480

[46] Dehlendorf, C., Grumbach, K., Schmittdiel, J. A., & Steinauer, J. (2018). Women's career attainment and the perceived compatibility of work and family in obstetrics and gynecology. Academic Medicine, 93(6), 888-895. doi: 10.1097/ACM.0000000000002132

[47] Carnes, M., Devine, P. G., Baier Manwell, L., et al. (2015). The effect of an intervention to break the gender bias habit for faculty at one institution: A cluster randomized, controlled trial. Academic Medicine, 90(2), 221-230. doi: 10.1097/ACM.0000000000000552

and raising awareness about the importance of women's inclusion in the medical field, stakeholders can work together to drive meaningful change.[48]

By implementing these strategies, stakeholders can prioritise and promote women's inclusion in the medical field, creating a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive healthcare workforce. Empowering women in medicine not only benefits individual women professionals but also contributes to better healthcare outcomes, improved access to care, and a healthier society as a whole.

Conclusion

Throughout this article, we have explored the topic of women's involvement in the medical field in Pakistan, drawing inspiration from the Prophetic era. We highlighted the active participation of women in various social activities during that time and emphasised the compatibility of women's involvement in medicine with Islamic teachings and traditions. Furthermore, we discussed the current challenges faced by women in medicine in Pakistan, including societal biases and discrepancies in the acceptance of women's social work. On a positive note, we examined the progress made by women in the medical profession, their transformative role in revolutionising healthcare practices, and the benefits of their inclusion, such as diverse perspectives and improved healthcare outcomes. Lastly, we discussed strategies to prioritise and promote women's inclusion in the medical field, including policy changes, educational opportunities, and breaking societal stereotypes.

The inclusion of women in the medical field is of paramount importance for Pakistani society. By embracing gender equality and empowering women in medicine, we can create a more inclusive and equitable healthcare system. Women bring unique perspectives, skills, and experiences that enhance healthcare delivery and decision-making. Their involvement not only benefits women themselves but also leads to improved healthcare access and outcomes for all patients. Moreover, including women in the medical field aligns with the principles of justice, compassion, and equality espoused by our religion and exemplified by the Prophetic era.

In conclusion, we must recognise the urgent need to create a more inclusive and equitable healthcare system in Pakistan by prioritising and promoting women's inclusion in the medical field. It is incumbent upon policymakers, educational institutions, healthcare

[48] Etzkowitz, H., Kemelgor, C., Neuschatz, M., & Uzzi, B. (2000). Barriers to women and minorities for accessing careers in science and engineering. International Journal of Technology Management, 20(8/9/10), 1083-1093. doi: 10.1504/IJTM.2000.002891

organisations, and society as a whole to take action. We must advocate for gender-sensitive policies, provide educational opportunities, break societal stereotypes, and establish support mechanisms for women in medicine. By doing so, we can foster a healthier society where women's contributions are valued, their talents are nurtured, and their potential is fully realised. Let us work together to build a healthcare system that embraces diversity, empowers women, and ensures equal opportunities for all healthcare professionals. By taking these steps, we can create a future where women thrive in medicine and contribute to the betterment of Pakistani society as a whole.