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A Step to Improve Maternal Health in Mountain Region of Pakistan

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The availability of health care services is limited in isolated mountainous regions in northern Pakistan. The inadequate availability of skilled medical practitioners and facilities in Chitral and Gilgit is contributing to the higher number of maternal deaths during childbirth in comparison to the rest of the country. To help address this issue, the Aga Khan University School of Nursing and Midwifery team have been providing training to midwives and nurses in Chitral and Gilgit by adapting World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines.



Antenatal care refers to regular checkups and screenings for pregnant women to monitor the health of both the mother and the fetus. WHO recommends that pregnant women receive at least four antenatal care visits to help identify and address any potential risks and complications?

The pieces of training we provide focuses on an essential topic such as detecting high-risk pregnancies, Cord Prolapse, Obstructed & Prolong Labor and Shoulder Dystocia, Pre-Eclampsia, and Eclampsia, promoting healthy lifestyles choices, and preparing a birth plan. By enhancing the knowledge and skills of local healthcare providers in Chitral & Gilgit, we aim to improve the level of antenatal care for expecting mothers in this region. Timely antenatal care and the early identification of high-risk factors can help save the lives of both mothers and babies. Our program is a step towards empowering midwives and nurses and building a sustainable healthcare system to serve communities across Chitral and Gilgit. Together, we can work to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates in Pakistan.

The WHO guidelines recommend focused antenatal care, which includes counseling and educating pregnant women about nutrition and birth planning. We train the midwives and other health care providers on providing these services in a compassionate and culturally-sensitive manner.

Common risks during pregnancy that we train them include gestational diabetes, pre-eclampsia, anemia, infections, fetal growth restriction, and preterm labor. Appropriate diagnosis and management of these conditions can help to avoid life-threatening complications.

We also train community midwives on sterile practices for safe deliveries when facility-based care is not possible. This includes proper umbilical cord care, immediate breastfeeding, keeping the newborn warm, and signs that indicate the need for referral to a hospital.

Our training program has been conducted in partnership with the AKHSP health department since 2021. Together we have trained over 120 new midwives and nurses so far, with the goal of improving health outcomes for mothers and newborns across Chitral and Gilgit.



We monitor and evaluate the impact of our pieces of training through follow-ups with health care providers, community surveys, and by reviewing maternal infant's health metrics at local health facility centers. The results so far indicate improved quality of antenatal care, safe deliveries, and increasing rates of facility-based births.



Tags: #maternalhealth #reproductivehealth #mountainousregion