

MATERNAL MORTALITY: BEREAVEMENT EXPERIENCES FOR SURVIVING CHILDREN OF BALOCHISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Maternal Mortality is a leading cause of death among married women, especially in underdeveloped countries. After death of mother, all family members suffer but the surviving children would suffer the most. Therefore, this study was conducted to know the socio-psychological consequences of maternal mortality on surviving children in District Kech, Balochistan. The study is qualitative in nature because of the nature of data and expertise of the researcher. 20 participants, both males and females surviving children were selected for conducting Key Informants Interviews to the know lived experiences of the children. Two Focus Group Discussions were carried out for better understanding of the experiences of surviving children after the death of their mothers. One FGD was carried out with 6 females who left their mothers and another one was conducted with 8 males who lost their mothers due to delivery or pregnancy complications. The age of selected participants were ranged between 10 to 25 years. The district and participants both were selected through convenient sampling technique. Thematic analysis was used for data analysis process. The results of the study suggest that the surviving children have suffered socially and psychologically because they could not get emotional attachment and affection that they could get from their deceased mothers. The orphan children were also socially isolated and treated differently by other family members. The study further suggests that the government should have clear policies and provide economic supports and help them to be independent and self-confident for better socio-psychological well-being.

Keywords: Maternal Mortality, Bereavement Experiences, Socio-psychological consequences, Surviving Children, District Kech

INTRODUCTION

The death of mother before, during or after 24 days of delivery is common death factor among women in the world but the advanced countries tried prevent and control the maternal mortality ratio by providing quality healthcare services to the pregnant women. On other hand, the developing and under developing countries are still unable to control the preventable maternal mortality. Various social, economic, infrastructural and political constraints for periphery and semi-periphery countries are responsible for increasing the number of maternal deaths. Poverty, gender

inequality, lack of women empowerment, unavailability of necessary health facilities for pregnant women and political instability are the majority factors responsible for the death of pregnant mothers. Including the advanced countries, the developing and under developing countries are also signatories of various international conventions on women rights. For example, all countries of the world had agreed on Target 3.1 of Sustainable Development Goals to reduce the maternal mortality ratio less than 70 per 100,000 live childbirths by 2030. The developed countries

initiated various steps for tackling the issue and the poor countries still lag behind. Developed countries like Finland has 1 mother death for 100,000 live childbirths while South Sudan, a poor country, has 1223 per 100,000 live childbirths. The countries with less socio-economic and infrastructural development and political instability have higher rate of maternal deaths and Pakistan is among them.

Pakistan, a country among under developing states, has been confronting maternal mortality and death of pregnant women which is a common death factor for women in the country. Though Pakistan has committed to reduce maternal mortality ratio to Target 3.1 of Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, it fails achieve the target on respective year because the human development index of the country is deteriorating day by day which is linked with maternal mortality. The state run healthcare facilities lack proper infrastructure and healthcare services, the poverty ratio is increasing and socio-cultural factors already deep rooted and political situation of country is deteriorated. So, due to above mentioned problems, a person can easily predict that Pakistan would be unable to achieve the SDGs target 3.1 by 2030. Still 154 mothers in Pakistan leave their precious lives before/during/after delivery annually. Within Pakistan, the situation is also worsen in Balochistan, one of the four provinces of Pakistan. For example, Punjab, KPK and Sindh have 157, 165 and 224 deaths per 100,000 live childbirths respectively. On other hand, Balochistan has 289 per 100,000 live childbirths. The MMR is the highest among other provinces of Pakistan. Due to death of mothers, the remaining family members especially surviving children suffer socially, economically and psychologically.

The present study is conducted to investigate the consequences of maternal mortality on surviving children. Study tries to investigate the socio-psychological impacts of maternal mortality on left behind children. Various studies (Miller & Belizán, 2015; Zhou et al., 2016; Moucheraud, et al., 2015; Molla, et al., 2015) showed that the death of mothers would leave negative and harmful impacts on socio-psychological status of living children. More importantly, the living daughters would bear

greater loss of maternal mortality. Mostly, females would leave their studies and they are married forcibly or become the victim of child marriages (Tulloch, 2015). In present study, the researcher investigates the consequences of maternal mortality on living children in District Kech, Balochistan. The researcher conducted Key Informant Interviews and Focused Group Discussions with adult children who have lost their mothers due to maternal mortality. The researcher tried to find out various socio-psychological impacts of maternal mortality on living children of District Kech because very less study have been conducted on the topic in the context of Balochistan in general and Kech in particular.

Literature Review

Maternal mortality is the death of pregnant women before, during or after 42 days of delivery of a child. Death during delivery or pregnancy is common women in the world but the death of mother would leave devastating effects on living children. This study is carried to know the various social and psychological impacts of maternal mortality among living children in District Kech, Balochistan. The studies carried out by different scholars in the world showed that the death of mothers would greatly affect the sociological and psychological status of living children. The findings of a research reported published by Family Care International, ICRW, & KEMRI/CDC Research and Public Health Collaboration (2014) showed that after of the death pregnant women, impacts the future opportunities, health and education and increases the ratio of poverty among living family members.

The relationship between death of pregnant mother and gender are very deep. The girls would suffer greater than the boys after the death of mother. The death of mother leads the girl child for early marriage and pregnancy and high chance of school-drop-out (Yasmin et al., 2015). The caregiving traditionally is the role of women and orphan females would be responsible of caregiving of other family members after the death of mothers. This would harm her educational opportunities and health. Bazile et al (2015) found that after maternal death, the infant child suffers in terms of health and nutrition. The orphan

females would be assigned caring duties and the orphan children would suffer economically and they have to bear educational loss because the remaining family members would bear the schools supplies and fees. Children would also suffer psychologically and socially. Another study carried out Kumar et al. (2014) that the morbidity rate among orphan children is higher than the children with surviving mothers. Despite this, the study further highlighted that children without mother face variety of psychological distress because he/she is deprived from the love and affection of mother in their childhood. Anderson et al. (2007) believed that family experiencing maternal mortality has the greater rate of newborn infant deaths than the surviving mothers because the newborn does not receive proper breastfeeding and artificial feeds. The study concluded that the mother death during pregnancy/delivery has great impact on the survival of the children.

The maternal mortality affects not only the children but also affect the caregivers after the death of mother. Knight & Yamin (2015) studied maternal mortality and its impact on left behind family members in South Africa. After the death of mother, the caregivers could face various difficulties to manage the surviving children and their education and fulfill the basic needs. The social protection and emotional or psychological support provide by caregivers to the surviving children insufficient. The death of mother, the caregiving responsibilities were given to female family members which could affect the caregivers due to economic burden.

Method of the Study

The core purpose of the study was to investigate the consequences of maternal mortality on surviving children. After the death of pregnant mother, the surviving children would be the most affectees. They surviving will suffer both psychologically as well as socially because the emotional and social supports provided to the children by mother is never received by other family members. Therefore, this study tried to understand the socio-psychological problems confronted by the surviving children after the death of their mothers. The study was qualitative in nature and Area was carried out

in District Kech, Balochistan. The participants were the living children of those mothers who died due to pregnancy related complications. 20 participants were interviewed both males and females. 10 male and 10 female children whose mothers died due to maternal mortality. The age group was 12 to 25 years old. Two (2) Focus Group Discussions were conducted with living children of those women who left their lives because of pregnancy related diseases. One (1) FGD with males and one (1) with females. All participants were belonged to District Kech. Semi-structured interview schedule was adopted as a tool for data collection. The participants and location of the study were selected through convenient sampling technique because the research could approach the participants easily. Secondly, District Kech has one of the highest education ratio districts in Pakistan yet the MMR is high in the district. The collected data would analyzed through according to themes.

Findings and Results

The death of mother follows various socio-psychological snags for remaining family members but children would suffer the most because they could not get the social and psychological supported which were received by their mothers. After carrying out the study, following findings were explained by the research participants.

A 20 years old girl child said, "After the death of my mother, I was treated as second citizen by other family members." Being a girls is very difficult because society believe that she is burden on the family. Most of the time, girls were married soon without focusing her age and needs. As a female participant said:

When my mother died on her 4th pregnancy, I was almost 11 years and studying 7th class. I have two brothers who are older than me, were told by family to drop out her from school. I left school and passed my 8th class on private. After passing 8th, one day, I was told that I was going to be married with a man who was 40 years old. I resisted little a bit but all family members including closed neighbors forced me to marry because being orphan, it is better to marry. Now I am 20 years old and I have 3 children (Personal Communication, FGD 2).

Being an orphan and a girl is also very difficult in Baloch social structure because each and every work performed by mother would be transformed living girls due to which she has to take care the house, and also deprived from health, and education opportunities. A female participant said, "After the death of mother, I have to take care the home chores and other siblings. I feel that I should be in school but orphanage does allow me. Most of the time, I could not share when I would be diseased."

Maternal mortality equally affects the sons both psychologically and socially because after the death of mother, they feel loneliness and isolation. As Male participant said, "At was the 2nd delivery of my mother during delivery, she was taken for hospital but did not remain. When she left me, I always think about her and no one other family member give me love, and affection as she gave. I also feel loneliness and weep when I would be alone but never share with others." Talking to the researcher, another participant said, "Mother is the only soul who devotes all happiness for the children, when she leaves, the children would be deprived from love of mothers which cannot be fulfilled by any other person in the world." Mother always provides emotional support, affection, and create a comfort zone for her children. Never shares sorrows to her children. Talking to FGD 1, one of the participants said, "It is mother who bears all difficulties and create a heaven for her children unfortunately, I have left my mother and I know the cost of losing mother." The loss of mother and transformation of responsible to grandmother is another issue in terms of maternal mortality. All responsibilities of caring the living children are transformed to the grandmothers when daughter-in-law dies. She is responsible for provision of food, education and good health. A participant from FGD 2 said, "It was her 3rd delivery when she left us. She was not taken her to hospital because distention of healthcare facilities. She further said after the death of mother, we (girl with her bother) are living with our grandmother is unable to provide care which was given by mother though she try hard to make us happiness." Orphan children living with grandmothers also suffer psychologically and socially because most of the time the grandmothers cannot provide all facilities due

to weak socio-economic background. A participant in FDG 1 said:

We are 4 siblings and one of the siblings is psychologically unfit. We also belong to a poor socio-economic background and now we are living with our grandmother. Father has married and stepmother also lives at the same house but she never cares us. We only get food from stepmother but all other responsibilities are on the shoulder of grandmother. I always found her worried about our education, and health and also worried about the medicines of mentally unfit daughter of mine (Personal Communication, FDG 1).

Child would not only suffer psychologically and socially by losing his/her rather that would have to bear the words and languages by the community members or peer groups. A male participant said, "People believe that the one who has mother is superior to the one who does not have. Such language hearts me a lot when people use." Using such languages compels the orphan to be isolated and feel inferiority complexity. Another male participant said, "I have been living with my grandmother since my mother left us and each and every thing is provided to me but when I would be playing with my age mates, they would always taunt me as orphan due to which I feel inferiority among them." The inferiority complexity in childhood leaves negative impact on the future of child. This inferiority affects the psychological health of child and became s permanent character of his/her personality in future.

Death of mother brings nutritional problems for surviving of newborn infant because newborn infant does not receive proper breastfeeding, and insufficient artificial feeds which would create the risk of death and stunting. As a female participant said:

"It was her 3rd delivery when she was left. Remained for a week after delivery but suddenly she was attacked by paralysis. She could not move and after three days of decease, she had left us with a newborn infant. The infant needed breastfeeding or artificial feeds but we could not provide due to which the infant died about 10 days of mother's death (Personal Communication, FGD 3).

Similarly, one of the participants of FGD 2 explained, "When my mother died, she left

behind an infant and all burden was on grandmother for caregiving. She tried a lot but infant lived a stunt life." The stunting children never develop biologically as well as psychological and in later life that would suffer both psychologically and biologically because mother is the only person who could provide both according to the need of infants. So, the maternal mortality and surviving determine the survival and death of infants. The infant risk of death, if the mother dies.

The contribution of mother for the psychological development of children is incredible. The death of mother develops variety of psychological problems in surviving children. Childhood without mother would be a great problem the young child. One of participant from FDG 1 elaborated:

After of the death of mother, many father married with my stepmother and I am not cleared due to which I am very disturbed psychologically. Sometimes, I tried to commit suicide but a close friend of mine has forbidden me. My education is disturbed and mother always treat me as second citizen. As a famous Balochi saying 'Mat'e badal mato nabi eth (Stepmother can never be like mother) (Personal Communication, FDG 1).

The surviving children after the death of mother due to maternal mortality have to suffer psychologically. Emotional disturbance and helplessness develop depression and anxiety in living children. A female participant said, "After death of mother, I cannot share my sorrows and happiness to anyone. No one cares about me. No one is there to give love like mama. After her death I always cry and weep when I will be alone at room." The distress and sadness for surviving children is the only way.

Discussion

The mother who leaves her newborn child would suffer psychologically as well as socially because she is pressured by family and close relative. This process develops guilt in her (Rodrigues et al., 2020). Similarly, maternal mortality leaves bereavement experiences for living children. The living children would have to bear the cost of mother's death by suffering psychologically and socially. Sigmund Freud, an Austrian psychiatrist, emphasized that the childhood experiences and sexual orientation

would determine the future of children (Traylor, J., Overstreet, L., & Lang, D. (2022) and the child does not receive proper sexual pleasure would feel inferiority complexity. If a child losses his/her mother in early ages, he/she does not receive proper sexual orientation in childhood and would always feel inferiority when meets with other age mates. Likewise, study showed that the maternal death would create risk of death and stunting for newborn children which creates psychological and biological problems of him/her and surviving older children suffer educationally, health and early or forced marriages especially for girls (Miller & Belizán, 2015; Ronsmans et al., 2010; Braitstein et al., 2013). Study also showed that infants with dying mother has higher rate of death as compare to the one with surviving mothers (Bazile et al., 2015; Kumar et al., 2014). The present study explored that the maternal mortality leave psychological problems like depression, anxiety, loneliness and isolation, distrust and mistrust, helplessness, sadness and many more. The similar results have been found out by researchers (Cluver et al., 2012; Saraswat & Unisa, 2017). Researchers reported that the maternal mortality creates vulnerability and variety of psychological problems among surviving children. Despite this, the study current study also showed that the living children has to take the responsibilities of caring the elder siblings and manage the household activities after the death of mother. Especially for girls, the responsibilities of all home chores are managed by her which would affect the education and health of her (Ntuli, Sebola, & Madiba, 2020). Despite psychological impacts, maternal mortality would affect the education and well-being of the surviving children. The study shows that after the death of mothers, the surviving children will be unable continue their education and well-being of the children would be affected (Pillay, 2018). Well-being in all social spectrum of surviving such as health, education, promotion and protection, social security etc. would be affect due to maternal mortality (Mokgatle-Nthabu, 2013).

Conclusion

Maternal mortality is a global issue but the situation is deteriorated in under developed countries like Pakistan. Similarly, the situation of maternal death is very common in Balochistan where a great number of women live their precious lives due to preventable cause of maternal mortality. Mothers' death leave socio-psychological problems for surviving children. The result of present study showed that majority of participants have suffer and feel inferiority complexity after leave their mothers. After the death of mother, grandmother will be caregiving to the surviving children which creates psychological and social impacts in their lives because they would get love, affection and emotional attachment provided by mother. When the surviving children would get with peer groups and community, they would be stigmatized as Chorah (Orphan) which affects the psychology of the children. Despite this, education and health of children experiencing maternal mortality will be affected and especially for girls take the responsibility of home chores and other siblings. The girls also suffer in terms of child or forced marriage because the orphan girl has to marry, otherwise, no one is there to take care here after the death of mother. Another important issue found from the finding is that survival of newborn infant and its burden on grandmother or other family creates problems. The death ratio of newborn infant with mother death is higher than the surviving mother. Finally, complete welling-being and psychological stability of surviving children will be in danger if their mother dies during pregnancy related complications. Enhance, the maternal mortality affects the overall socio-psychological well-being of surviving children.

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Author Contributions

N Sh conducted the study, collected data, wrote and edited the manuscript.

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Data Availability

The study data are available and will be provided upon request.

Ethics, Consent to Participate, and Consent to Publish declarations are not applicable.

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