

Women and health

Abstract

Much hue and cry has been made regarding equal status of men and women in the society. Many social networking, NGOs and reformatory organizations claim that the position of women in the society has much improved, as much as, in certain countries the rights of women have become more than those of men and they have started misusing these rights also. In India women are taken to be symbol of Goddess and they are worshipped in the form of mother, sister and daughter. Here, we don't find that they are being worshipped in the form of wife. But, as per my experience as a medical doctor, the condition of women in many countries is still pathetic. It is not only inferior to males, but in certain circumstances, worse than animals as far as women's health is concerned.

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Mini review

We are living in 21st century. Many of the under-developed countries have become developing countries. And especially for women this era has become a boon in the form of literacy, human rights, employment and equality with men and so on and so forth. When we find such news on social media with names of some enlightened ladies we become proud of development and sometimes jealous too with them as a man. But, my long experience as a doctor in different countries like India, Nepal, Libya and Malaysia shows me the other side of the picture, especially about women's health. It is really pathetic and deplorable and we can't believe that such things happen in this so called modern era! Here I just want to share some of my experiences and feelings based on the facts. In combined Bihar in India I worked in the tribal areas for six long years. Lots of patients, both male and female, used to visit me at the referral hospital or in my private chamber. Moreover I was assigned by the Government to prepare a report on unqualified private practitioners in the rural areas. So, I got an opportunity to feel village folk very closely. Most of us know the condition of rural females.

It is far from the picture shown to us by the Govt. reports. Whether it is illiteracy, ignorance, and lack of knowledge of hygiene, domestic violence in indirect form or even sane living on day to day basis, the females are the worst sufferers. They have almost no say on the number of children they will produce and regarding their health upkeep! India is an agricultural country, but still cultivation has not been modernised in most of the villages. If the lady of the family and the bullock in the field fall sick simultaneously, the head of the family decides to treat the bullock first due to financial strain and assures the lady that she would be treated well once the crops mature and fetch some money.

Ladies themselves are ignorant and shy to share their health problem especially if the problem is lady-specific. Only when the sickness goes beyond control, they are being shown to the village unqualified medical practitioner as they think it is cheap and easily available, no transport is needed to take her to the govt. clinic and moreover the ladies also do not feel comfortable in facing the qualified doctors whom they take as outsiders! These unqualified practitioners squeeze the best out of them in the form of cash or kind and even sometimes on the assurance that he would be paid double once the crops are sold in the market. If the disease goes out of his hand, he

just refers the case to the towns, where most of the time they cannot go because of short of money resulting in increased mortality and morbidity among women. It is okay if it is true for all the village persons, but, most of the time they would seek the help of qualified doctors if some male folk falls sick, though for him they have to sell some piece of land also. This makes the difference.

I was in Libya also for 5years and used to study my patients apart from treating them. There too I found the gender difference as far as taking care of the women health is concerned. Decision depends upon the head of the family, who is again a male only. There was not such financial constraint there unlike India. But, the social and religious believes make them the victim of the system. Although there they are much more liberal than some of their neighbouring countries, still female mortality is much higher than the male mortality. In Nepal, where I was posted for 3years, the condition was more or less similar to India. Poverty, ignorance illiteracy and lack of medical resources all have made the females victims as far as their health is concerned. Moreover, most of the male population from the villages have shifted overseas in search of jobs and females left behind unattended.

In Malaysia, where I am for last 5years, things are different. Financial problem and lack of medical facilities are not to such an extent as in other developing countries. Moreover social security is also here to some extent for the local population. But, the main problems are illiteracy, ignorance and social conditions prevailing in the local rural females. A case of early carcinoma of the breast was brought in the hospital and after investigations she was advised immediate operation. She didn't turn up and was brought to the clinic only after 10months with a fulminating ulcer over the breast, obviously an advanced stage of cancer. On questioning she said that she was told by her friends that doctors cannot cure cancer and she underwent some other non-specific treatment and start taking house-made medication. This ignorance took a valuable life. This is not an isolated case but it has been cited as an example. All these things lead to the conclusion that multiple factors are there in different countries in some form or the other which tales upon women's health and we should try to alleviate these factors as early as possible. Women's health journals are one of the powerful tools to make the females aware about their health and encourage the NGO's to act more effectively in this direction. A healthy woman can only prepare a healthy family and a healthy family will contribute to form a healthy society and a healthy nation. And then only our world will be truly beautiful.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.