



Bridging the healthcare gap: empowering women through physical therapy in Pakistan

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Recently, I had the opportunity to read an insightful editorial by Dr. Huma Riaz¹ that highlights the evolving landscape of women's health physical therapy in Pakistan, emphasizing a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to practice. The editorial rightly emphasized that despite the expanding global scope of Women's Health Physical Therapy,² this field continues to face significant challenges, particularly in Pakistan. Among the most pressing are the lack of awareness among healthcare professionals and the general community.

Building on this important discussion, I wish to highlight the often-overlooked role of physical therapy in addressing women's unique health needs. These needs are further complicated by cultural stigmas, limited access to care, and low levels of health literacy. These barriers not only restrict service delivery but also hinder women from seeking essential rehabilitative care. In Pakistan, where comprehensive healthcare access for women remains limited, physical therapy represents a vital yet often overlooked component of women's health—an issue also emphasized by Dr. Manjula G. K. in her book *The Social Context of Women's Health*.³

Physical therapy plays a pivotal role in addressing a variety of health conditions that disproportionately affect females. From adolescence to post-menopause, women encounter health issues that can be effectively managed with the help of specialized physical therapy. For instance, women are more prone to certain musculoskeletal conditions, including osteoporosis, pelvic floor dysfunction, and postural changes resulting from pregnancy.⁴ During and after pregnancy, many women suffer from lower back pain, pelvic girdle pain, and issues like diastasis recti and urinary incontinence.⁵ Moreover, physical therapists play a crucial role in treating

pelvic floor disorders, which can arise not only during pregnancy and childbirth but also in older women due to age-related changes.

Despite its importance, the awareness and availability of specialized women's health physical therapy in Pakistan remain inadequate. Many women continue to suffer in silence from conditions such as incontinence, chronic pelvic pain, and postpartum complications, issues that can be effectively managed through focused physical therapy interventions. Unfortunately, cultural stigmas, lack of health literacy, and limited access to trained specialists prevent countless women from receiving the care they need.⁶ In many rural areas of Pakistan, cultural norms often discourage women from seeking medical and physical therapy treatment, viewing it as unnecessary or inappropriate. Women also hesitate to discuss the health concerns that discourage open dialogue about women's health related problems. This silence exacerbates suffering and leaves women vulnerable to long term complications that could be easily prevented or treated.

As healthcare professionals, policymakers, and advocates for women's health, addressing this gap is imperative to improving women's health outcomes and ensuring equitable access to care across Pakistan. To address this gap, the inclusion of women's health-specific physical therapy modules in medical and nursing curricula should be prioritized. Collaboration with local healthcare providers, NGOs, and community leaders can facilitate grassroots awareness campaigns targeting underserved areas. For instance, leveraging radio and local TV programming can effectively disseminate health education tailored for women in rural communities. Addressing this gap in healthcare will

not only improve the quality of life for countless women but also reduce the long-term burden on the healthcare system by preventing chronic conditions and disabilities that arise from untreated physical health issues.

In conclusion, the need for women's health physical therapy in Pakistan is both urgent and essential. As efforts continue to strengthen the healthcare system and address women's unique health challenges, physical therapy must be recognized as a vital component of care. From managing pregnancy-related conditions to treating chronic pelvic pain and musculoskeletal disorders, physical therapy offers women effective, non-invasive solutions. It is imperative for healthcare leaders, policymakers, and public health advocates to prioritize this field. By investing in specialized services and increasing public awareness, Pakistan can take meaningful strides toward improving women's health nationwide.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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