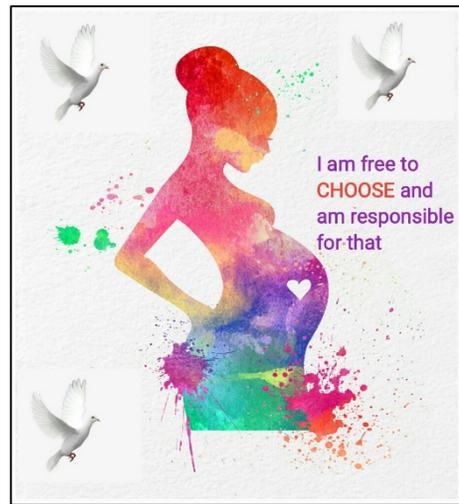


HER BODY IS NOT HIS PROPERTY

MS. JAWARIA KASHIF (PAKISTAN)

Every individual has the right to make decisions about his/her health and reproductive rights. It is understood that whenever we get ill, we need a doctor and do not need anyone's permission to receive care. But in Pakistan, this rule is not applicable to most women and girls. Similarly, a married woman must have the right to plan her pregnancy or choose how many children she may have.

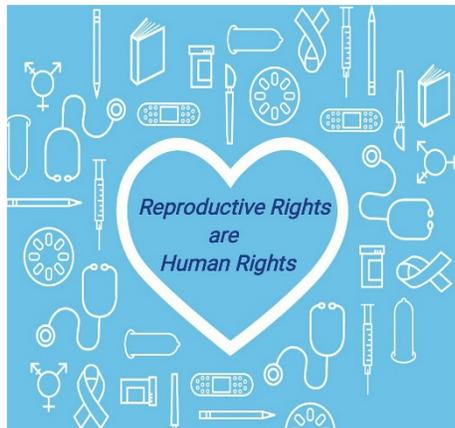
Unfortunately, in Pakistan most women are unable to even talk about family planning specifically in the countryside, while urban women have an awareness about their health care and reproductive rights. There are many rural areas in Pakistan where health facilities are not yet available to women and girls for medical checkups and safe child birth. On average, 48.1 percent of women and girls aged between 15 and 49 years in [Pakistan](#) have no say in choices concerning their own health care.



According to the population [census](#) of 2017 by Pakistan's Bureau of Statistics, men and women respectively make up 51% and 48.76% of the population, which means that there are 105 men for 100 women in Pakistan.

In February 2018, a [report](#) was published by UNICEF. According to the report, Pakistan is a country with the highest newborn mortality rate where infants have a one in 22 chance of death, compared to newborns in Japan that have only a one in 1,111 risk of dying.

The indicators provided in the 2018 [UNFPA](#) report tell us that the maternal mortality rate (MMR) per 100,000 live births in Pakistan is 178. Fifty-two percent of births between 2006 and 2017 were attended by skilled health workers. However, prenatal, antenatal and postnatal care is not provided to most of these women. According to this report, between 2006 and 2017, 21% of girls in Pakistan were married by the age of 18. However, they have no say in making decisions on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in Pakistan. This is an alarming situation.



Married women and girls aged 15-19 have little to no knowledge of modern contraceptive procedures, and those who do know do not have permission from their male partner to use them or are too shy to talk about it.

The [adolescent](#) pregnancy rate in Pakistan is 44 out of every 1000 live births. The reasons for this are a lack of knowledge and non-availability of sexual and reproductive health services.

In Pakistan, many married women and girls have the desire to stop bearing children but face social pressure. One major example is that if a woman gives birth to a girl, she must continue to have children unless and until she gives birth to a

boy. This is because Pakistan is a male-dominated society and the family system is led by a man. A Pakistani wife lives under massive social pressure and if she fails to give birth to a boy, the husband is permitted to get married a second or even third time to have a son.

Likewise, married women and girls in Pakistan cannot opt for median birth intervals. Pregnancies are unintentional. Most husbands do not think about the physical and mental health of their wives. They do not realize that their wife cannot bear child after child because she is not a machine.

It is also a fact that only 49% of female students had prior knowledge about [menstrual](#) hygiene management before they had their first period.

Pakistani women and girls must now take a stand and raise their voices in support of their own health care and reproductive rights. They have to defy gender roles on this subject too, as they have defied them in many other matters. There is still a long way to go. The government of Pakistan should invest more in women and girl's health programs so that they may know about their reproductive rights. Frequent awareness raising campaigns on sexual and reproductive health rights must be run by the government to change the mindset of the community about the common myths and misconceptions found in many groups.

Every woman and girl in Pakistan must know that her body is only her property and she must have the power to choose.



Naseem a Pakistani rural woman working in Lahore as a maid & baby sitter, who suffered many miscarriages and other health issues due to early /child marriage.