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A demographic and socio cultural study in a group of urban Pakistani girls and women

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Nishtar town, one of the nine towns of Lahore, consists of a population of one million. The GWHI team collected demographic (66 variables) and anthropometric (Height, weight & BMI) data. Awareness sessions are held for groups of approximately 50 women regarding sanitation, hand washing, clean food and drinking water, nutrition, gynecological issues and general health.

The prevalent health issues were identified. Girls and women are largely unaware of their right for health; Women's health is not a priority for them and their families. Huge taboos exist regarding gynecological problems and their treatment. Fatigue and depression were common even among teenaged girls. Malpractice is rampant. Large family size is a significant part of the problem and women are unaware of various reproductive health issues. Anemia is still a huge problem with 70% prevalence among girls and women. There exists no concept of health screening. Gender inequity, financial constraints and cultural barriers are common. There is significant under-utilization of Government-run health facilities at all levels. Community health workers usually received drug supplies late and out of season.

GWHI proposes to reduce the underutilization of existing Government-run facilities by training of medical, paramedical and community staff in communication skills. Advocacy by affluent girls and women to help their under privileged counterparts will be a cost effective option along with a mass media campaign.

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