

PRESS RELEASE

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NATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN LAUNCHES RESEARCH STUDY ON STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE OF WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RIGHTS.

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ISLAMABAD, December 13, 2017: Identifying gaps, obstacles, opportunities and possible solutions for strengthening health governance for women's reproductive health and rights (RHR), an intervention study by Shirkat Gahwas launched by National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) on Wednesday.

The study titled "Strengthening Governance in Health System for Reproductive Health and Rights (RHR) in Pakistan: An Intervention Case Study" is based on the findings of a four-year intervention (2014-17) carried out in six districts across four provinces of the country with the support of International Development Support Center (IDRC).

The study presents evidence-based recommendations for improved equity, community participation and government responsiveness within health governance system for women's reproductive health and rights in the country. **Federal Minister for National Health Services, Regulations, and Coordination Saira Afzal Tarar was the chief guest on the occasion. While presiding, Federal Minister for Health Saira Afzal Tarar urged culture-sensitive approaches for all initiatives and projects for women's RHR at district level. She said that no law can be implemented if the society rejects to change its traditions and norms. She also stressed the need to engage men in all advocacy efforts. She said termed lack of human resource the biggest challenge for health sector at district level. "There is no short cut to women's empowerment. We need to educate them and aware them of their rights for substantial change. We have to make the society realize that women make families, families make communities and communities make a nation. Women are nucleus of a nation," she said.**

In her introductory remarks, NCSW Chairperson Khawar Mumtaz talked about alarming indicators of health for women. "Health budget is doubled and donors have also been extending aid in health sector especially reproductive health but unfortunately we fail to achieve the results," she said. She announced to form a committee at the NCSW to formulate national framework for women's RHR.

Sharing the findings of the study, Executive Director ShirkatGah Farida Shaheed said biggest obstacle in the way of women's reproductive health and rights is the social mindset. "Girls are not supposed to discuss reproductive health issues. Even if reproductive health facilities are available in the locality, visiting such facility is considered a source of shame especially for girls. And when a girl reaches the facility, she doesn't discuss her issue with the doctor directly. She is always represented by her family member," shared Farida.

She said that at district level, people are more comfortable in visiting public health facilities but there are complaints of the discouraging and rude behavior of health staff in such facilities. Those who came in contact with public health facilities also reported sexual harassment by male staff.

The report recommends strong communications strategy by the government and civil society to create awareness on reproductive health issues and sensitize the health staff. The report also suggests provision, repair and maintenance of medical equipment, better compliant mechanism, and display of code of conduct on sexual harassment at district health centers, refreshment courses and technical training for health staff.

Chairperson Provincial Commission on the Status of Women for Khyber Pakhtun khawa, Neelum Toru recommended collaborative efforts and building connections to improve the situation. MPA Shameela Aslam talked about the social mindset that discourages women from utilizing their full potential. She shared her experiences as a women politician and the way she fought for her rights.

