

Case Study: Moomal



Moomal¹ and her husband lived in Khairpur. She was 40 years old, and her husband was unemployed. Both husband and wife were illiterate. She had been pregnant twelve times. From her twelve pregnancies, she had four miscarriages and had delivered 8 children. Four of her children died, and four were alive, three girls and one boy.

Her husband was unable to maintain any form of steady employment. He usually worked as a daily wage labourer or took on short term work in agriculture whenever he could find some. Moomal earned a little money through begging. Since they were so poor, none of their children went to school, and the girls spent their time helping their mother with domestic chores. Though they had very little money, Moomal wanted another child. She became pregnant once again, for the thirteenth time. She also suffered from high blood pressure. Due to her poverty and illiteracy, she did not consult any doctor or go for any sort of ante-natal care.

When she was five months pregnant, she had a miscarriage followed by bleeding, which continued for some time. However, she did not get any medical help, since Moomal and her husband did not have any money, either for transportation to a health facility or for medical care. She later developed fever and continued to suffer. This went on for almost a month.

One day, Moomal and her husband got into an argument and her husband subjected her to severe physical abuse. She subsequently fell very ill. Eventually, her husband decided to take her to a hospital. Since he did not have any money, he sold one of their daughters for Rs. 1,000.00 to raise money for her medical care.

Though transportation was readily available, Moomal was made to walk for five hours to reach Civil Hospital, Sukkur. The doctors there advised that she should be hospitalized, but her husband refused, saying that he did not have enough money to pay for her medication or for any treatment, and took her home. Three days later, Moomal died at home, rendering her remaining four children motherless.

The most likely direct cause of Moomal's death is septic abortion, but her situation probably became worse due to her age, multiple pregnancies, physical abuse, poverty, and neglect. Had she been able to get help in time, and had access to a medication such as Misoprostol, as well as a provider who knew how and when to administer it, her life could potentially have been saved.

¹ True story as narrated in the Verbal Autopsies – Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey, 2006-07.

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