

A Social Perception Regarding Prevalence of Cancer Disease in Mountain Areas of Pakistan

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Cancer has posed to be the most lethal disease in Gilgit Baltistan in recent years with highest fatality rate compare to other diseases in the region. Moreover, cardiac disease is recorded to be the second most lethal disease in GB. Apparently, the progression of this disease, in the region dates back to two decades maximum. However, there is a major gap found on research as it has not been addressed unfortunately with adequate research to ascertain the root causes, its history and other significant aspects related to this disease. This research seeks to present perception prevailing among the mountain communities in the region about the spread of this disease based on the experiences and observation of the abrupt change in the life style of the people. It proposes to address the void with studies, researches and preventive measures adopting a scientific approach. Cancer is a new and fast spreading disease in mountain areas of Pakistan. Gilgit Baltistan is located in extreme north of Pakistan covered with snowcapped mountains, including second highest peak of world K2. The settlements are located at an altitude of 1400 to 3400 meters above sea level. The people are dwelling in highly scattered areas with small land terraces. Couple of decades back, the communities were 100 percent dependent on their own agricultural production for a livelihood. The area gained high attention for its longevity and that triggered a few researches to figure the reasons of people living long lives. The food was considered one of the major reasons particularly organic fruits such as apricot. However, the lifestyle has embraced a twist with opening up of routs to china and Pakistan through KKH built in 1978. People preferred to opt for education and the hope for change in life triggered a massive migration of mountain communities to major cities and down streams. There was a shift from organic farming to the packed foods. The farmers adopted the exotic species that were not tested to find out the diseases it brought along. More over the farmers liked the cultivate the cash crops instead of staple crops. This movement led to create changes in their lifestyles including eating patterns. As a result, the Cancer has emerged to be one of the fast spreading diseases in the region. Men and women of all ages have suffered from this disease with very less percentages of recovery. Unfortunately, Gilgit-Baltistan lack the health facilities for the treatment of the patients with cancer as there is no single hospital in the entire region with 1.8 million population. The absence of testing facilities aggravates the cases of cancer as the most the cases are diagnosed at third of fourth stages having very less changes of recovery. Furthermore, the treatment in the major cities is very expensive that a few can afford. The majority of people and the patients have limited resources and the treatment costs them the limited landholdings and

sometimes their houses. This abstract only will showcase the social perceptions regarding fast spreading of this disease. However, it is so unfortunate that there has no any systematic research has been conducted to prob into the main causes of the cancer. Some commonly identified reasons derived from the social lens are presented here. Almost majority of people agree that the change in food patterns has the greatest role in spread of this diseases.

The food supplied from the down country is hardly monitored to check its quality. At the same time people with low purchasing power chose to buy the groceries with less prices. Thus, it is believed that very substandard food is supplied to almost all districts with no checks on it. Similarly, the use of pesticides and fertilizers in agriculture and horticulture has also contributed in a hike in number of cases of the disease. A group of people held the changing environment responsible for an increase in the cases of cancer. The pollution they believe is one of the major causes. Some people think that the absence of physical exertion might be behind this disease which has also caused many mental ailments such as anxiety and tension. Further few people believe that the harsh weather may cause cancer with sharp sunlight at higher elevations. Water borne diseases are very common in Gilgit Baltistan. Thus, to some of the community member the water has been the major reason. As for as types of cancer are concern there are cases of almost all types such as stomach cancer, blood cancer, skin cancer, breast cancer among women, brain tumor and lungs cancer. My recommendations are for government and for the civil society separately. The government as well as the civil society need to carry out in-depth studies to figure the root causes of the disease. However, the government will require to provide facilities for the treatment at the door step of the people of the region keeping in view their economic condition. For civil societies and NGOs (as Non-Government Organizations are very active here in mountain areas of Pakistan) should focus and conduct scientific research and find out the reasons and propose a way forward to the government. The studies must also come up with the dos and don'ts for the communities in their lifestyle taking appropriate preventive measures. In doing so, the academia and international expertise can be taken on board. The government and civil society creating synergies to address this fast spreading menace can help saving number of precious lives also saving the belongings of many poor families. The incentives should be given to the farmers for adopting organic farming to revitalize the healthy practices of agricultural farming that was once of the major reason of highest longevity in Pakistan.

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