

Impact of Environment on Women's Health

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Abstract: Women interact with environment much more in day to day life and therefore become a victim of various environmental issues easily. Various types of chemicals and other substances present in the environment can cause different types of health problems in women. Several studies are going on how toxins present in the environment may play key role in menopause, breast cancer and endometriosis. Exposure to toxic materials like cadmium, mercury, arsenic, lead, pesticides, solvents and household chemicals can enhance the risk of premature delivery, miscarriage and other pregnancy complications. These and other environmental toxins can also harm the developing babies and infants. Pregnant or going to be pregnant woman or even women with new born babies should take proper care to get rid of exposure to certain chemicals, pesticides. Indoor and outdoor air pollution both can accelerate plural disease, heart problems, asthma, obstructive pulmonary disease etc. Women having exposure to pollutants for a longer period of time from early ages may have health problems in older age. In those postmenopausal women having exposure to lead at early stages might be affected by kidney failure, high blood pressure and reduced cognitive functions. Most of the women spend about ninety percent of their daily time at indoor environment hence they are more prone to indoor air pollution resulting in irritation of eyes, nose and throat and have headaches and become drowsy and tired. Indoor air pollution might cause lung and heart diseases leading to cancer. Many women are more sensitive to prolonged indoor air pollution and affected by the release of carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter, formaldehydes from stoves, heaters, fireplaces and chimneys. Inside house or workplace, Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are emitted which contain a variety of chemicals from adhesives, paintings, spraying of pesticides, construction materials, office logistics resulting in health problems. A woman could be a victim of "Sick building syndrome" due to poor indoor air quality, lighting, noise, poorly designed workstations. Environmental hormones are kind of chemical substances which can interfere with natural hormones inside a woman's body causing reduced fertility. The present study will focus on the various sources of environmental contaminations that can affect women, their effects, symptoms and finally try to provide recommendations to get rid of the effects to some extent. Meetings, social gatherings, awareness campaigns, various environmental day celebrations and acknowledgement of woman could be used for further environmental education.

Key Words: - Pollution, Women, Health, Impact, Environment, Disease

Introduction

The present study has tried to understand more about the relationship between women's health and the environment, specifically reproductive health, cancer, and heart attacks. Exposure to environmental pollutants, chemicals, and industrial products can affect a woman's health negatively—from decreasing her ability till pregnancy and upto a baby to full term to increasing her risk for cancer and heart attacks. Air pollution, lead, and some solvents have been linked to increases in risk of prematurity or preterm delivery. Short- and long-term exposure to particulate air pollution has been tied to heart attacks and other forms of coronary heart disease. Certain environmental factors may increase the risk for particular cancers, such as external ionizing radiation and thyroid cancer or asbestos and lung cancer.

Materials & Methods

Environment & Woman Health

Woman well being is closely linked with the well being of environment. However, over the years, there has been progressive pressure on the environment and the natural resources, the consequences of which are becoming increasingly evident in form of environmental damage & health risks, thus reducing the benefits of development. Population growth and intensification of human activities through agriculture development, urbanization and industrialization all over the world have created various environmental problems. The environment is under constant interference by human.

The effects of environment on women's health can be measured in the following terms:

- The extent to which environmental conditions lead to shortening of life.
- The extent to which such conditions create disability among those who are exposed to it.
- The extent to which the full biological potential of an organism is not realized.

Specific Health Effects of Air Pollutants

- Irritation of the eye, nose and throat.
- Lead particulates causes lead poisoning resulting in convulsions, delirium, coma and even death.
- Cadmium particulates cause cardiovascular diseases, kidney and liver damage and even death.
- Nickel particulates result in respiratory damage.
- Mercury causes nerve, brain and kidney damage.
- Radioactive fallout has somatic and genetic effects.

Specific Health Effects of Water Pollutants

- Water pollution reduces the amount of pure water available on the planet for necessities like drinking, cleaning and recreational activities.
- Factors responsible for water pollution may be artificial or natural.

- The unprecedented release of industrial effluents and sewage into fresh water bodies is responsible for scarcity of pure drinking water.
- About 70% of the water bodies in India are polluted.
- The common water pollutants are the industrial effluents, municipal wastes, pesticides, oil spills etc. Further, a mere 5% to 7% of the country's pollution is covered by sewage facilities and only 3% have by sewage treatment plants.
- It is estimated that on account of pollution of rivers and lakes, more than 60% of the diseases are water borne in India which result in a loss of nearly 73 million working days.

Disease	Type of Organism	Symptoms and Comments
Cholera	Bacteria	Severe vomiting, diarrhea and dehydration, often fatal if untreated
Typhoid	Bacteria	Severe vomiting, diarrhea, inflamed intestine, enlarged spleen – often fatal if untreated
Bacterial Dysentery	Bacteria	Diarrhoea
Para-typhoid Fever	Bacteria	Severe vomiting, diarrhea
Infectious Hepatitis	Virus	Yellow jaundiced skin, enl

Specific Health Effects of Solid Waste

- Discharge of industrial sludge or dumping of solid both wastes, from industries and the municipalities is the cause of increasing pollution.
- Another important factor is the increase in use of pesticides in our agricultural fields.
- A typical classification of industrial and municipal solid waste includes: garbage, rubbish, ashes, hospital refuse, large wastes, dead animals, industrial, mining wastes, agriculture wastes.
- Most of these solid waste dumps provide habitat to a variety of disease producing and transmitting organisms.
- The indiscriminate use of pesticides to prevent damage of crops by insects has lead to widespread contamination of environment with pesticide residues.
- These have resulted in contamination of ground and surface water, food and food products.
- The worldwide use of pesticides is increasing by 2.3% every year. Most of these pesticides are mutagenic and carcinogenic.
- They can stop cell division and produce chromosomal. DDT is known to cause hepatocarcinoma, leukemia, aplastic anemia etc.
- Increase in urbanization has adversely affected the ecological balance by depleting both renewable and non renewable resources faster because of the high Energy requirement of urbanities.
- It also results in creation of slums which leads to deteriorating life quality, poor health services and flourishing of communicable diseases.
- In many big cities (like Mumbai & Kolkata) slum population accounts for about 40% of the total city population resulting in filthy surroundings, lack of basic amenities and hence a disease prone life.
- Besides the direct negative impact of deteriorating environmental quality on human health, loss of natural Resources have also adversely affected life quality.
- Deforestation has resulted in biodiversity loss which is essential for maintaining the basic life supporting process. Flora & fauna is the source of a large number of medicines which are essential for maintaining human health.

Results & Discussion

Environmental impact on women's health can only be controlled by having proper Women and Child Welfare schemes. The main objectives behind these schemes are -

- To improve the social, economical, health and nutritional status of the women.
- To improve the physical, mental, intellectual development of the children and to improve the health and nutritional status and protect the children from malnutrition.
- To protect the constitutional rights of women and create awareness about different programmes pertaining to women welfare and laws of protection.
- Several initiatives have been taken by the Government to improve the status of women.

Major programmes implemented and initiatives undertaken by the Govt. in the area of women's empowerment and child welfare are:

1. Support to Training cum Employment Programme (STEP)

The scheme renders support to women's employment in sectors like agriculture, dairying, small animal husbandry, fisheries, khadi and village industries, handlooms etc., where women are predominately engaged in work. The scheme focuses on the poorest, the unorganized and asset less women.

2. Socio-Economic Programme

Under this programme, the Central Social Welfare Board gives financial assistance to voluntary organizations for a variety of income-generating activities, providing work and wages to needy women. Small economic units, handloom and handicrafts units, dairy and other animal husbandry programmes like piggery, goat-rearing, sheep breeding and poultry are supported under this programme.

3. *Women's Development Corporation*

The Scheme for setting up Women's Development Corporations in States was formulated in 1986+87 with a view to identifying women entrepreneurs, providing them with technical consultancy, facilitating availability of credits, promoting marketing of products, strengthening women's cooperatives, arranging training facilities etc.

4. *Swa-Shakti Project*

Swa-Shakti Project (earlier known as Rural Women's Development and Empowerment Project) was sanctioned on 16 October 1998 as a Centrally sponsored project for a period of five years. The objective of the project are:

- a) Establishment of self-reliant women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs);
- b) Sensitizing and strengthening the institutional
- c) Developing linkages between SHGs and credit-lending institutions,
- d) Enhancing Women's access to resources for better quality of life and ,
- e) Increased control of women, particularly poor women, over income and spending, through their involvement in income-generation activities,

5. *Welfare and Support Services*

- Financial assistance is given to voluntary organizations for construction of hospitals for working women.
- Grant-in-aid is also given to voluntary organizations /institutions to assist/run short-stay homes for women and girls who are in social and moral danger.

6. *Advocacy and Sensitization*

- Development indicators stand witness the gender gaps that exist in various areas of our social and economic life.
- The constantly declining sex ration, which now stands at 927 females to 1000 males, the growing incidence of female foeticide, the prevalence of female infanticide and the high rates of infant and maternal mortality demonstrate that even survival of the girl child/woman is critical areas of concern.

7. *Support through Legislation*

- These include Equal Remuneration Act, Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, Criminal Laws and Indian Evidence Act, Maternity Benefit Act, Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, Dowry Prevention Act.
- A Landmark legislation on the pre-natal diagnostic technique to prevent its misuse was passed in April 1994.
- The 73rd Amendment to the constitution providing for one third reservation for women in the Panchayats and local urban bodies is the most important landmark in the women's empowerment efforts.

8. *National Commission for Women*

The main area of activities of commission constituted on 31 January 1992 includes review of the constitutional and legal safeguards for women, recommending remedial measures, facilitating redressals of grievances, undertaking studies and investigation, participation and advice in the planning process and generally advising the Govt. on all matters of policy affecting their welfare and development of women in the country.

9. *National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development*

The objectives of the institute are to develop and promote voluntary action in social development, take a comprehensive view of child development and develop measures for coordination of governmental and voluntary action in social development and evolve a framework and perspective for organizing children's programmes through social and voluntary efforts.

Conclusion

The forging analysis and interpretation regarding the environmental pollution and its impact on the health, it may be concluded that the uneven growth of population in city together with overcrowding is primarily responsible for the poor environmental conditions. The ill effects of the environment invited many more diseases which adversely affect the public health especially the women and children. The city has grown up with time, with increase in population through natural growth and immigration, but the amenities, facilities and infrastructure remained the same. In many areas of the city economic or commercial growth with adequate environmental protection has resulted in wide spread environmental damage, creating new environmental problems. Health and education starts from where women and children spend most of their time. So, indoor pollution has a close impact on women's health. Indoor pollution is the contamination of all the pollutants which together forms the overall ambience of indoor environment. If we cannot keep our houses free from pollution, how outdoor is expected to be safer. To reduce order to check indoor air pollution, well ventilated housing plan should be proposed by the housing development corporation. It should be binding to everyone.

The housing plan should not be passed by legal authorities if it is devoid of ventilation. Separate kitchen with full ventilation should be allowed to prevail. The use of bio-fuels should be replaced by LPG or if possible by the solar cookers, scientific stove, and smokeless chulhas be encouraged in place of traditional means of cooking. The government should offer maximum subsidies for the said purpose. More and more steps should be taken to improve the condition of the slums and squatter settlements. Govt. should take steps to replace jhuggi jhopri with one or two room sets on full ventilation basis under different Awas Yojanas.

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