

**REFORMING PAKISTAN'S HEALTHCARE
SYSTEM: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH
DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING
COUNTRIES ON SYSTEM ENHANCEMENT
NEEDS AND FINANCING**

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**ASIA e UNIVERSITY
2025**

REFORMING PAKISTAN'S HEALTHCARE SYSTEM: A COMPARATIVE
ANALYSIS WITH DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ON
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the issues and inequities in Pakistan's healthcare system using perspectives of structure, problems, and inadequacy in contrast to developed as well as developing countries. Lack of physical infrastructures, human power, and a weak health system compounded with weak governance structures in Pakistan pushed the country into this position across the healthcare index. Analyzing Pakistan in relation to other countries emphasize on excess and outdated medical technology, minimum and decreasing health care investment, lack of preventive care and health education which turns into a lens to compare with developed countries. In order to complement these gaps, an analysis technique known as Thematic Analysis was used and includes variables like patient satisfaction, Healthcare accessibility, Technological adoption and Healthcare funding. By using thematic analysis, noticeable connections were revealed with the meaning that hospital capacity, financial points, and investments in healthcare technologies and human resources are critical for enhancing the quality and readiness to respond to the healthcare crises. Moreover, interview experiences of professional healthcare, patient participants, and financial experts provide the understanding that the system relies on the external funding source, lacks proper integration with technology, and has no accountability. The findings drawn from it are associated with the four essential directions of the reform, including increasing the hospital's capacity, ensuring financial stability, implementing updated technologies, and raising people's awareness. Benchmarking Pakistan's healthcare system against the developed countries and identifying the strategies to achieve working public-private partnership, enhance the healthcare funding, and to adopt and set the effective use of the advanced technology such as the telemedicine in the Pakistan. It provides comprehensive policies on the healthcare improvement in Pakistan, in addition to arguing for the importance of investing in a strong healthcare system as a means to bolster the economy and increase the population's standards of health.

Keywords: Healthcare system, system enhancement needs, healthcare financing, healthcare infrastructure, health workforce challenges

APPROVAL

This is to certify that this thesis conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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(19 February 2025)

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the programme and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
APPROVAL	iii
DECLARATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF TABLES	xii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiv
LIST OF ABBREVIATION	xvi
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.0 Background of Study	1
1.1 Overview of Healthcare System in Pakistan	3
1.1.1 Top-Performing Healthcare Systems: International Comparison	8
1.1.2 Public Sector Health Expenditures in Pakistan	9
1.2 Problem Statement	11
1.2.1 Key Challenges and Weaknesses in Pakistan's Healthcare System	11
1.2.2 Lack of Comparison of Pakistan's Health Care System with Developed Countries in Terms of Latest Medical Equipment's and Advanced Technology	13
1.2.3 Problems in Identifying of Critical Areas that Need Improvements	13
1.2.4 There are No or Little Initiatives Undertaken to Improve the Healthcare	13
1.2.5 Problems in Educating People to Take Care of Their Health	16
1.2.6 Research Gap: Reasons for Selecting this Research Topic to Fill the Gap	18
1.2.7 Research Gap and Strategies to Bridge the Healthcare Disparity	19
1.2.8 Strategies to Bridge the Healthcare Gap Between Pakistan and Developed	20
1.2.9 Bridging the Healthcare Gap: A Comparative Analysis between Pakistan and other Developing Countries	23
1.3 Research Objectives	27
1.4 Research Questions	28
1.5 Research Hypotheses	28
1.6 Operational Definitions	29
1.7 Justification of the Study	29
1.8 Significance of the Study	32
1.9 Theoretical Contribution	34
1.9.1 Systems Theory	34
1.9.2 Theory of Welfare Economics	34
1.9.3 Social Learning Theory	35
1.9.4 Psychodynamic Theory	35
1.9.5 Theoretical Frameworks on Healthcare Disparities and Crisis Management	35

1.9.6	Health Behavior Theory and Education	36
1.9.7	Theoretical Insights on Economic Development and Healthcare Investment	36
1.9.8	Policy Formulation and Implementation Theories	37
1.9.9	Global Health Governance and International Cooperation	37
1.9.10	Innovation Diffusion Theory	38
1.9.11	Governance Theory	39
1.10	Practical Contribution	40
1.11	Contribution to Methodology	42
1.12	Scope of the Study	44
1.13	Thesis Structure	44
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW		46
2.0	Introduction	46
2.1	Overview of Pakistan's Healthcare System	47
2.2	Theoretical Framework	58
2.3	Theoretical Perspectives on Healthcare Systems (Aligned with Section 1.10)	62
2.3.1	Systems Theory	62
2.3.2	Theory of Welfare Economics	63
2.3.3	Social Learning Theory	64
2.3.4	Psychodynamic Theory	64
2.3.5	Integrative Perspective: The Application of Theoretical Frameworks	65
2.4	Health System of the Developed Countries	65
2.4.1	Norway's Healthcare System	66
2.4.2	Australia's Healthcare System	66
2.4.3	Germany's Healthcare System	67
2.4.4	Comparative Analysis: Doctor-to-Patient Ratio	67
2.4.5	Healthcare Technology and Innovation: A Global Perspective	68
2.4.6	Healthcare 4.0: The Future of Healthcare Systems	68
2.5	Factors Influencing Innovation in Healthcare Services	72
2.5.1	Organizational Practices and Methods	76
2.5.2	Organizational Structure and Distribution of Responsibilities	78
2.5.3	Relationship with Stakeholders	81
2.5.4	Knowledge Sharing and Organizational Culture	83
2.5.5	Technological Integration and Information Systems	86
2.5.6	Knowledge-Based Society and Healthcare Industry Evolution	91
2.5.7	Sociocultural Factors and Public Perception of Innovation	95
2.5.8	Policy and Regulatory Frameworks for Innovation	100
2.6	Pakistan Healthcare System & Covid-19	104
2.7	Conceptual Framework	106
2.7.1	Health Education and Awareness	107
2.7.2	Technological Advancements and Innovation	108
2.7.3	Comparative Insights from Global Health Practices	109
2.8	Case Studies-Technology Driven of Developed Countries	109
2.8.1	Case Study 1: Estonia's E-Health System	110

2.8.2	Case Study 2: South Korea's National Telemedicine System	110
2.8.3	Case Study 3: Rwanda's Use of Drones for Medical Supplies	111
2.8.4	Case Study 4: Singapore's Health-Hub Platform	111
2.8.5	Case Study 5: United Kingdom's NHS Digital Transformation	112
2.8.6	Integrating Case Study Insights into the Study's Analysis	113
2.9	Research Gaps and Study Rationale	113
2.10	Conceptual Framework	115
2.11	Clarification of the Relationship	119
2.12	Linking Innovation Discussion (Chapter 2) to Study Objectives	120
2.12.1	Strengths of Pakistan's Healthcare System	121
2.12.2	Availability of Qualified Healthcare Professionals	121
2.12.3	Expanding Healthcare Infrastructure	121
2.12.4	Public-Private Partnerships	121
2.12.5	Integration of Digital Health Solutions	121
2.12.6	Community Health Programs	122
2.12.7	Strong Medical Education System	122
2.12.8	Policy Support for Healthcare Development	122
2.13	Literature Review: Healthcare Systems in Developing Countries	122
2.14	Chapter Summary	127
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY		129
3.0	Introduction	129
3.1	Research Design & Data Collection	131
3.2	Population and Sampling	133
3.3	Data Collection Procedures	134
3.4	Data Analysis	135
3.5	Survey Design and Sampling for Healthcare Model Validation	136
3.6	Research Ethics	137
3.6.1	Trustworthiness	138
3.6.2	Transferability	140
3.6.3	Dependability	140
3.6.4	Conformability	141
3.6.5	Interview Procedure	142
3.6.6	Pilot Study	143
3.6.7	Reliability and Validity of Data	144
3.7	Justification for Comparing Pakistan with Developed Countries	145
3.8	Justification for Expanding the Focus Group Size for Qualitative	145
3.9	Revised Sampling Strategy	146
3.9.1	Strengthening the Qualitative Research Process	146
3.9.2	Updated Qualitative Data Collection Approach	147
3.9.3	Addressing Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis	147
3.10	Chapter Summary	148
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS		150
4.0	Introduction	150
4.1	Assessment Criteria and Respondents Profile	151
4.2	Descriptive Analysis	153

4.2.1	Demographic Profile of Respondents	153
4.2.2	Distribution of Key Responses	154
4.2.3	Comparison of Health Indicators between Pakistan and Selected Developed Countries	160
4.3	The Interviews	177
4.3.1	The Interviews: Verbatim Transcripts and Thematic Insights	177
4.3.2	Comparing with Developed Countries and Bring Improvements	180
4.3.3	Integrating Verbatim Quotes into Thematic Analysis	186
4.4	The Surveys	187
4.5	Thematic Analysis of Interviews and Surveys	193
4.5.1	Thematic Analysis of Survey Responses	193
4.5.2	Thematic Analysis of Interviews Key Challenges in Pakistan's Healthcare System	201
4.5.3	Thematic Analysis Report on Pakistan's Healthcare System	205
4.6	Infrastructure and Capacity Constraints	205
4.6.1	Funding and Financial Allocation	206
4.6.2	Technology and Digital Health Solutions	206
4.6.3	Health Education and Preventive Care	206
4.7	Policy and Governance Issues	207
4.7.1	Comparative Insights with Developed Countries	207
4.8	Discussion of Findings - Final Analysis	207
4.8.1	Inadequate Healthcare Infrastructure and Accessibility	208
4.8.2	Human Resource Shortage and Capacity Building	209
4.8.3	Financial Constraints and Sources of Financing the Health Care Sector	209
4.8.4	Technological Integration and Innovation	211
4.8.5	Preventive Care and Public Health Education	212
4.8.6	Lessons from Developed Countries	212
4.8.7	Superior Healthcare Infrastructure and Human Resources	212
4.8.8	Emphasis on Primary Healthcare and Preventive Care	213
4.8.9	Universal Health Coverage and Publicly Funded Insurance Systems	214
4.8.10	Public-Private Partnerships for Improved Service Delivery	214
4.8.11	Integration of Advanced Technologies in Healthcare	214
4.8.12	Efficient Healthcare Financing and Resource Allocation	215
4.8.13	Accountability and Transparency in Healthcare Management	215
4.8.14	Continuous Professional Development and Training	216
4.8.15	Strong Health Education and Public Awareness Programs	216
4.9	Chapter Summary	217
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION		220
5.0	Introduction	220
5.0.1	Governance Challenges and Reform Directions	220
5.0.2	Healthcare Financing and Resource Allocation	221
5.0.3	Technological Readiness and Integration Gaps	221
5.0.4	Preventive Healthcare and Public Awareness	222

5.0.5	Comparative Summary and Strategic Alignment with the Developing Countries	222
5.1	Research Implications	222
5.2	Theoretical Implications	226
5.3	Methodological Implications	229
5.3.1	Application of Mixed Research Method	229
5.3.2	Structured Questionnaires and Semi-Semi Structured Interviews	229
5.3.3	Pilot Testing for Instrument Validation	230
5.3.4	Cross Sectional Research for Comparative Study	230
5.3.5	Use of Snowball Sampling	230
5.3.6	Thematic Analysis for Qualitative Data	231
5.3.7	Descriptive and Inferential Statistical Techniques	231
5.3.8	Ethical Issues in the Course of Research Psychology	231
5.3.9	Flexibility of Methodology to Contextual Issues	231
5.4	Policy Implications	232
5.4.1	Increased Health Sector Investment and Fiscal Accountability	232
5.4.2	Universal Health Coverage through Public Insurance	232
5.4.3	Rural Infrastructure Development and Public–Private Partnerships	233
5.4.4	Health Workforce Development and Retention	233
5.4.5	Integration of Digital Health Technologies	233
5.4.6	Strengthening Governance and Accountability Mechanisms	234
5.4.7	Emphasis on Preventive Healthcare and Health Education	234
5.4.8	Crisis Preparedness and Health Security	234
5.4.9	Equitable Distribution of Health Resources	234
5.4.10	Sustainable Financing Beyond Foreign Aid	235
5.5	Key Issues in Pakistan's Healthcare System	235
5.6	Limitations of the Study	237
5.7	Recommendations	240
5.7.1	Increase Healthcare Spending	241
5.7.2	Enhance Healthcare Infrastructure	241
5.7.3	Adopt Advanced Healthcare Technologies	241
5.7.4	Promote Preventive Care and Public Health Education	242
5.7.5	Strengthen Health Crisis Preparedness	242
5.8	Future Research Directions	242
5.9	Conclusion	246
5.9.1	Main Findings and Research Questions Addressed	246
5.9.2	The Key Findings Can be Summarized as Follows	247
5.9.3	Synthesis and Final Insights	247
	REFERENCES	249
	APPENDICES	260
	Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire	260
	Appendix B: Responses from Google Forms	261

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
Table 1.1	Health Institutional Survey	4
Table 1.2	Health Indicators of Pakistan and its Neighbors	6
Table 1.3	Top-Performing Healthcare Systems	7
Table 1.4	Health Expenditures by Government	9
Table 1.5	Health Expenditures by Developed Countries	11
Table 1.6	Health Expenditures by Government	15
Table 1.7	Health Expenditures by Developed Countries	16
Table 2.1	Mortality Rates and Other Indicators	48
Table 2.2	Statistics Regarding Infectious Diseases	49
Table 2.3	Doctor to Patient Ratios (per 1000 Person)	50
Table 2.4	Number of Healthcare Facilities Province Wise	53
Table 2.5	Comparison of Developed Countries with Pakistan	69
Table 4.1	Respondent Demographics	153
Table 4.2	Comparison of Health Indicators	160
Table 4.3	Registered Medical and Paramedical Personnel	164
Table 4.4	Summary of Budget 2023 – 2024	166
Table 4.5	Federal and Provincial Health Expenditure	171
Table 4.6	Thematic analysis tables	197
Table 4.7	Funding and Financial Barriers	198
Table 4.8	Technology and Modernization	198
Table 4.9	Preventive Healthcare and Public Awareness	199
Table 4.10	Policy and Governance Issues	200
Table 4.11	Comparative Insights with Developed Countries	200

Table 4.12	Infrastructure and Capacity Constraints	201
Table 4.13	Funding and Financial Allocation	202
Table 4.14	Technology and Digital Health Solutions	202
Table 4.15	Health Education and Preventive Care	203
Table 4.16	Policy and Governance Issues	204
Table 4.17	Comparative Insights with Developed Countries	204

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
Figure 1.1	Pakistan Budget (2023-2024)	37
Figure 2.1	Doctor to Patient Ratios across Different Countries	50
Figure 2.2	Doctor to Patient Ratio of the Asian Region	51
Figure 2.3	The Number of Healthcare Facilities across Pakistan	54
Figure 2.4	Distribution of Healthcare Facilities in Punjab	55
Figure 2.5	Distribution of Healthcare Facilities in Sindh	56
Figure 2.6	Distribution of Healthcare Facilities in KPK	57
Figure 2.7	Distribution of Healthcare Facilities in Baluchistan	58
Figure 2.8	Difference between Pakistan and Norway Healthcare System	69
Figure 2.9	Comparison of Healthcare Systems by Country	71
Figure 2.10	Factors Influencing Innovation in Healthcare Services	76
Figure 2.11	The Technological Integration in Healthcare	91
Figure 2.12	The Sociocultural and Public of Healthcare Innovation	100
Figure 2.13	Pakistan's Federal Structure	106
Figure 2.14	Pakistan's Leading Causes of Death	107
Figure 4.1	Pakistani Doctors Ratio	161
Figure 4.2	Dentists' Ratio in Pakistan	162
Figure 4.3	LHVs' Ratio in Pakistan	162
Figure 4.4	Nurses' Ratio in Pakistan	163
Figure 4.5	Midwives' Ratio in Pakistan	163
Figure 4.6	Experience & Specialization Ratio of Pakistani Doctors	165
Figure 4.7	Budget 2023 – 2024 & Estimated Finances	165
Figure 4.8	Budget in Health Sector of Pakistan (2017 to 2023)	167

Figure 4.9	Pakistan's GDP Growth (2015 to 2023)	168
Figure 4.10	Health Spending by USA	172
Figure 4.11	Health Spending by Pakistan	172
Figure 4.12	Health Facilities in KPK	173
Figure 4.13	Beds Ratio against the Patients in Baluchistan in Pakistan	173
Figure 4.14	Maternity & Child Welfare Centers in Baluchistan in Pakistan	174
Figure 4.15	Hospitals in Baluchistan in Pakistan	174
Figure 4.16	Overall Healthcare Organizational Aspects	175
Figure 4.17	Fiscal Data Ratio	175

LIST OF ABBREVIATION

AI	Artificial Intelligence
BHU	Basic Health Unit
CMS	Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CPH	Comparative Public Health
EHR	Electronic Health Record
EMR	Electronic Medical Records
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDPPC	Gross Domestic Product per Capita
HCP	Healthcare Professional
HCW	Healthcare Worker
HHS	Health and Human Services
HIS	Health Information Systems
HRH	Human Resources for Health
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IPMA	Importance–Performance Map Analysis
LMIC	Low- and Middle-Income Countries
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
MH	Mobile Health
MMR	Maternal Mortality Rate
NCD	Non-Communicable Diseases
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PHC	Primary Health Care

PHEIC	Public Health Emergency of International Concern
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PPP	Public–Private Partnership
QALY	Quality-Adjusted Life Year
RHC	Rural Health Center
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SHIT	Sustainable Health Information Technology
TB	Tuberculosis
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of Study

Pakistan, a developing country with a population exceeding 200 million, operates a complex and highly stratified healthcare system that warrants comprehensive research and systematic analysis (Hayat et al., 2020). The healthcare sector in Pakistan functions through a dynamic interplay between public and private entities, with both sectors contributing significantly to healthcare delivery. These entities are governed at multiple administrative levels federal and provincial often resulting in overlaps, policy fragmentation, and inconsistent service delivery. Notably, approximately 70% of the population seeks care in private hospitals and medical institutions, a trend supported by evidence that private facilities offer comparatively higher levels of efficiency and patient satisfaction (Hashami, 2020; Raza, 2021).

Despite this overwhelming reliance on the private sector, Pakistan's public healthcare system is burdened by long-standing structural deficiencies. These include underfunded services, fragmented governance, lack of accountability, and poor resource allocation. Weak infrastructure and a shortage of trained, fairly compensated healthcare professionals further impede effective service delivery (Meghani et al., 2014). The constitutional devolution of healthcare responsibilities to provincial governments with the exception of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) adds another layer of complexity. This decentralization affects both access to and satisfaction with healthcare across different regions.

According to the Economic Survey of Pakistan (2020–21), the country has a total of 14,331 healthcare facilities supported by a workforce of 454,496 medical professionals, including doctors, nurses, and paramedical staff (Hafeez et al., 2023).

Of these, 245,987 have been certified by the Pakistan Medical & Dental Council, validating their professional credentials. However, a significant portion of these qualified professionals emigrate in search of better working conditions, lighter workloads, and higher compensation a persistent brain drain that exacerbates domestic healthcare challenges. This is further compounded by the attrition of female healthcare workers, who often leave the workforce due to familial and societal obligations.

Consequently, there exists a striking imbalance in workforce distribution, one doctor serves approximately 1,300 patients, one nurse serves every 20 patients, and there are three nurses per doctor, underscoring critical human resource gaps in the sector (Khan, 2019). Moreover, the perception of public healthcare as universally accessible is not matched by reality. Financial inequities are stark, with 78% of patients financing their medical treatment through out-of-pocket expenditures, reflecting the inadequacy of public healthcare financing mechanisms (Mumtaz, 2018). Fearing low service quality and limited accessibility in public institutions, many citizens opt for private care despite the higher cost burden. In light of these challenges, this study situates Pakistan's healthcare system within a comparative framework, analyzing its performance relative to developed nations including the United Kingdom, the United States, and various European countries. The comparison emphasizes key dimensions such as healthcare financing, infrastructure, workforce capacity, technological integration, service accessibility, and governance quality. These criteria are selected to uncover the root causes of Pakistan's systemic inefficiencies and to identify international best practices that may inform contextually relevant policy reforms.

In light of the preceding discussion, this study undertakes a critical examination of Pakistan's healthcare system with a focused lens on governance,

financing, and technological integration three pillars that define the operational efficacy of any health infrastructure. By drawing a comparative framework with select developing countries that have made notable progress in reforming their health sectors, such as India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Thailand, this research aims to highlight actionable pathways for systemic improvement. The study not only explores the deficiencies in Pakistan's current system but also identifies scalable strategies rooted in comparative best practices. These encompass governance models that enhance accountability, innovative financing mechanisms that reduce out-of-pocket burdens, and technological frameworks that bridge service delivery gaps, particularly in underserved areas. Through this comparative analysis, the research intends to offer grounded, evidence-based insights that inform sustainable policy reform, institutional restructuring, and strategic investment in health technologies are all essential for transforming Pakistan's healthcare system into a resilient and equitable model.

1.1 Overview of Healthcare System in Pakistan

In many developing countries, including Pakistan, the healthcare system is organized around a dual structure comprising both public and private sectors. This duality creates a dynamic yet fragmented ecosystem where governance and service delivery responsibilities are distributed across multiple layers of government, primarily between federal and provincial authorities. Within this framework, private healthcare providers play a significant role. In Pakistan, private hospitals and clinics serve approximately 70 percent of the population, primarily due to their relatively better patient satisfaction, operational efficiency, and infrastructural quality compared to public sector counterparts (Hashami, 2020; Raza, 2021).

However, the public healthcare system, which is essential for equitable service provision, faces multiple structural and functional impediments. These include

administrative inefficiencies, weak accountability mechanisms, misallocation of resources, and a shortage of adequately trained and fairly compensated medical personnel. Furthermore, underdeveloped infrastructure in many areas severely restricts access to quality care (Meghani et al., 2014). These challenges are emblematic of broader systemic issues observed across many developing nations where health systems struggle under the weight of population growth, fiscal constraints, and governance limitations.

Constitutionally, in Pakistan and similar developing contexts, the primary responsibility for healthcare service delivery lies with provincial governments, although the federal level retains oversight of certain territories and strategic functions. In Pakistan’s case, the healthcare system comprises 14,331 medical facilities staffed by a workforce of over 450,000 professionals, including doctors, dentists, nurses, midwives, and community health workers. While this numerical representation may appear robust, disparities in distribution, skills, and service standards highlight the critical need for coordinated reforms across all subsystems to ensure equitable and efficient healthcare delivery.

Table 1.1: Health Institutional Survey

Table 1.1: Health Institutions and Personnel		
1	Hospitals	1,282
2	Dispensaries	5,743
3	Rural Health Centers	670
4	TB Clinics	412
5	Sub Health Centers	5,472
6	MCH Centers	752
	Total no. of health institutions	14,331

1	Doctors	245,987
2	Dentists	27,360
3	Nurses	116,659
4	Midwives	43,129
5	Lady Health Visitors	21,361
	Total personnel working in healthcare sector	454,496

Source: Pakistan Economic Survey 2020-21 <https://www.finance.gov.pk/survey>
https://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters_21/PES_2020_21.pdf

Nevertheless, the substantial quantities, often highlighted as a source of advantage, obfuscate underlying concerns. The presence of qualified medical professionals has considerable importance; nonetheless, a notable proportion of these individuals pursue job prospects overseas, enticed by more advantageous service structures, reduced workloads, and perhaps enhanced remuneration. Due to personal and societal pressures, many female healthcare workers quit due to the "brain drain" problem. Thus, the present ratio of physicians to patients is 1:1300, whereas the ratio of nurses to patients is 1:20, demonstrating a considerable gap with three nurses for every doctor. A noteworthy aspect that sometimes eludes public comprehension is the fact that, contrary to the widespread belief that healthcare services are universally available inside public institutions, the actual situation differs.

According to Mumtaz (2018), a significant majority of people, namely 78%, bear the financial burden of their healthcare expenditures. The insufficiency of public healthcare choices compels a substantial segment of the populace to seek private alternatives, which often provide comparatively greater accessibility to treatments. The inability of public hospitals to satisfy the healthcare needs of a fast rising population

leads many individuals to seek treatment from private physicians, thus straining the public healthcare system. This complicated terrain creates a healthcare system that annually faces preventable diseases including dengue fever, hepatitis, and malaria.

According to Butt et al. (2020), Pakistan’s vaccination coverage is 60%. The country's infant mortality rate of 70 per 1000 births is also concerning. Despite global advances, polio persists in the nation, highlighting its healthcare system's flaws. The aforementioned obstacles arise from the convergence of a continuously growing population, a shortage of competent healthcare professionals, concerns over accessibility, and fundamental structural inadequacies (Khan, 2019). Compared with its neighbors (see Table 1.2), healthcare indicators of Pakistan are not satisfactory.

Table 1.2: Health Indicators of Pakistan and its Neighbors

Country	Life expectancy in years	Infant mortality rate per 1000 births	Maternal mortality rate per 1000	Under-five mortality rate per 1000	Population growth rate
Pakistan	67.3	55.7	140	67.2	1.9
India	69.7	28.3	145	34.3	1
China	76.9	6.8	29	7.9	0.4
Afghanistan	64.8	46.5	638	60.3	2.3

Source: Ministry of Finance, Government of Pakistan (2021)

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the inherent weaknesses and vulnerabilities of Pakistan's healthcare system, highlighting its fragility (Aslam & Akram, 2020). The country faced substantial hazards arising from the possible implications of the pandemic, which were exacerbated by the delicate equilibrium of a faltering healthcare system, the weight of existing diseases, and widespread poverty (Shaikh, 2021). The disaster showed that a system unprepared for the outbreak lacked