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**AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY TO PRIMARY HEALTH  
CARE FOR THE RURAL AREA POPULATION IN PAKISTAN**

**MUHAMMAD SALMAN ABBAS**



**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA**

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**AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY TO PRIMARY HEALTH  
CARE FOR THE RURAL AREA POPULATION IN PAKISTAN**

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**A thesis submitted to the Ghazalie Shafie Graduate School of Government in  
fulfilment of the requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy  
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## ABSTRACT

Healthcare provision in rural areas of Pakistan remained a critical concern, especially in terms of the availability and accessibility of services. Despite national and international efforts to improve healthcare delivery, rural populations faced disparities due to inadequate infrastructure, workforce shortages, and socioeconomic barriers. This study investigated these issues, focusing on South Punjab, to offer insights into the determinants influencing healthcare access and the effectiveness of government policies. The objectives of this research were to 1) identify the determinants of healthcare availability and accessibility in rural Pakistan; 2) analyze the effectiveness of government policies aimed at improving rural healthcare access; 3) examine the challenges in implementing these policies; and 4) assess the broader impact of healthcare accessibility on education, employment, and social development in rural communities. The study employed a qualitative research design grounded in interpretivism, using thematic analysis to explore the subjective experiences of 15 doctors working in primary healthcare centers as well as one Deputy Commissioner, two community leaders and two Chief Executive Officers across South Punjab. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing for an in-depth examination of the factors influencing healthcare access. The thematic analysis revealed several key determinants impacting healthcare access, including inadequate infrastructure, workforce shortages, and socioeconomic barriers. Government policies have improved rural healthcare access; however, urban-centric planning, cultural barriers, and systemic inefficiencies continue to hinder progress, leaving significant gaps in rural development. This study contributed to the application of Modernization Theory to explore healthcare access in rural Pakistan. The theory suggested that economic growth and institutional reforms should improve public services like healthcare. In rural areas such as South Punjab, this framework examined how infrastructure, trained professionals, and policy can address healthcare gaps. The study finds that modernization benefits have been uneven, with significant rural-urban disparities. Interviews highlighted systemic issues and policy gaps. Future research could focus on decentralized governance and community-driven initiatives to bridge these healthcare access gaps.

**Keywords:** Rural Healthcare Pakistan, Primary Healthcare Access, Healthcare Disparities, South Punjab Healthcare, Government Healthcare Policies.

## ABSTRAK

Penyediaan penjagaan kesihatan di kawasan luar bandar Pakistan masih merupakan satu kebimbangan kritikal terutamanya dalam aspek ketersediaan dan kebolehcapaian perkhidmatan. Walaupun terdapat usaha dilakukan di peringkat nasional dan antarabangsa bagi meningkatkan penyampaian penjagaan kesihatan, penduduk luar bandar menghadapi jurang perbezaan disebabkan kemudahan infrastruktur yang tidak mencukupi, kekurangan tenaga kerja serta halangan sosioekonomi. Isu yang dikaji berfokuskan kepada kawasan Punjab Selatan bagi mendapatkan pandangan tentang faktor penentu yang mempengaruhi akses dan keberkesanan dasar berkenaan penjagaan kesihatan. Objektif kajian adalah untuk (1) mengenal pasti faktor penentu ketersediaan dan kebolehcapaian penjagaan kesihatan di luar bandar Pakistan; (2) menganalisis keberkesanan dasar kerajaan ke arah peningkatan akses penjagaan kesihatan di luar bandar; (3) mengkaji cabaran dalam pelaksanaan dasar Kerajaan; dan (4) menilai kesan yang lebih luas terhadap kebolehcapaian penjagaan kesihatan terhadap pendidikan, pekerjaan dan pembangunan sosial masyarakat luar bandar. Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk penyelidikan kualitatif berasaskan pendekatan interpretivisme dan menggunakan analisis tematik bagi meneroka pengalaman subjektif 15 doktor yang bekerja di pusat penjagaan kesihatan primer, seorang bertaraf Timbalan Pesuruhjaya, dua orang pemimpin komuniti dan dua orang bertaraf Ketua Pegawai Eksekutif. Data diperolehi melalui temu bual separa berstruktur, yang mana ia membolehkan penerokaan mendalam berkenaan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi akses penjagaan kesihatan. Hasil analisis tematik mendapati terdapat beberapa penentu utama yang memberi kesan kepada akses penjagaan kesihatan termasuk infrastruktur yang tidak mencukupi, kekurangan tenaga kerja dan halangan sosioekonomi. Dasar kerajaan telah menambah baik akses penjagaan kesihatan, namun perancangan berpusatkan bandar, halangan budaya dan ketidakcekapan sistemik terus menghalang kemajuan sehingga meninggalkan jurang yang ketara dalam pembangunan luar bandar. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada penggunaan Teori Pemodenan untuk meneroka akses penjagaan kesihatan di kawasan luar bandar Pakistan. Teori ini mencadangkan pertumbuhan ekonomi dan pembaharuan institusi harus meningkatkan perkhidmatan awam seperti penjagaan kesihatan. Rangka kerja ini mengkaji bagaimana aspek infrastruktur, profesional terlatih dan dasar dibentuk dalam menangani jurang penjagaan kesihatan di kawasan luar bandar seperti Punjab Selatan. Kajian mendapati faedah pemodenan antara kawasan bandar dan luar bandar adalah tidak sekata. Hasil temu bual menyerlahkan isu sistemik dan jurang dasar. Penyelidikan masa depan boleh menumpukan kepada tadbir urus desentralisasi dan inisiatif yang didorong oleh komuniti untuk merapatkan jurang akses penjagaan kesihatan.

**Kata Kunci:** Penjagaan Kesihatan Luar Bandar Pakistan, Akses Penjagaan Kesihatan Utama, Jurang Penjagaan Kesihatan, Penjagaan Kesihatan Punjab Selatan, Dasar Penjagaan Kesihatan Kerajaan.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Healthcare is the cornerstone of any society, directly influencing the overall well-being and success of individuals. Good health is essential for people to live fulfilling lives, pursue education, and contribute to their communities. Without access to quality healthcare, individuals are at a significant disadvantage, often trapped in cycles of illness and poverty. Healthcare provides the foundation for physical, mental, and social well-being, enabling people to achieve their full potential in both personal and professional spheres. It is the starting point for human progress, as healthy individuals are more likely to succeed in their endeavors, positively impacting the economy and the fabric of society.

Moreover, healthcare plays a pivotal role in promoting social equity and reducing disparities. Ensuring that everyone has access to healthcare, regardless of socio-economic status, is critical for building a just and fair society. When individuals have access to preventive care, early interventions, and treatment for illnesses, they are empowered to overcome challenges and lead productive lives. In essence, healthcare serves as the bedrock upon which all other successes are built, making it one of the

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## APPENDICES

### Interview Guideline

#### Section 1: Demographic Information:

- Participant's Name:
- Age:
- Gender:
- Education Level:
- Occupation:
- Years of Residence:

#### Section 2: Determinants of Availability and Accessibility to Primary Healthcare:

1. Can you identify factors that determine the availability and accessibility of primary healthcare services for rural populations in Pakistan?
2. How do socio-economic factors influence access to healthcare in rural areas?
3. In your experience, what role do infrastructural developments play in enhancing healthcare accessibility in rural communities?
4. Have you observed any community-specific factors that affect the availability of healthcare services?
5. How do cultural beliefs and practices impact healthcare seeking behavior in rural areas?

#### Section 3: Analysis of Government Policies:

1. From your perspective, what government policies have been implemented to improve primary healthcare accessibility in rural Pakistan?
2. How effective do you believe these policies have been in increasing healthcare availability?

3. Can you discuss any specific government initiatives that have had a noticeable impact on healthcare accessibility?
4. Have there been any challenges in the implementation of these policies? If so, what were they?
5. How do you think government policies could be further improved to better address healthcare accessibility issues in rural areas?

#### Section 4: Challenges in Policy Implementation:

1. What challenges have you encountered in the implementation of government initiatives aimed at enhancing primary healthcare accessibility in rural Pakistan?
2. Have there been any systemic or logistical barriers hindering the successful execution of these initiatives?
3. How do you perceive the involvement of local communities in the implementation process?
4. Are there any lessons learned from past implementation challenges that could inform future policy approaches?
5. What strategies do you believe would be effective in overcoming these implementation challenges?

#### Section 5: Impact on Education, Employment, and Social Development:

1. How do you think the presence of healthcare facilities impacts education, employment, and social development in rural communities?
2. Have you observed any tangible benefits or drawbacks of healthcare facility presence on education, employment, or social cohesion?
3. Can you provide examples of initiatives where healthcare accessibility has positively influenced education, employment, or social development?

4. Are there any areas where further integration between healthcare services and other development sectors could yield significant benefits?
5. In your opinion, how can policymakers better leverage healthcare infrastructure to promote holistic rural development?

