



BARRIERS TO ACCESS HEALTHCARE IN RURAL AREAS AND ROLE OF NURSES TO IMPROVE HEALTHCARE ACCESS IN SAUDI ARABIA

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Abstract:

Access to healthcare is a fundamental right that is often compromised in rural areas, particularly in countries like Saudi Arabia. This review article aims to explore the various barriers that impede access to healthcare services in rural areas of Saudi Arabia. By analyzing existing literature and studies, this review identifies key challenges such as limited healthcare infrastructure, shortage of healthcare professionals, cultural beliefs, financial constraints, and geographical isolation. Understanding these barriers is crucial for policymakers and healthcare providers to develop targeted interventions that can improve healthcare access and outcomes in rural Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: Rural Healthcare, Saudi Arabia, Access Barriers, Healthcare Infrastructure, Healthcare Professionals, Cultural Beliefs

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Introduction:

Access to healthcare is a pressing issue in rural areas of Saudi Arabia, where the population often faces significant challenges in accessing quality healthcare services. The inadequate healthcare infrastructure in rural regions exacerbates the problem, leading to long waiting times and limited services. Additionally, the shortage of healthcare professionals, especially doctors and nurses, further hinders access to timely and appropriate care [1].

Cultural beliefs and practices also play a significant role in shaping healthcare-seeking behavior in rural Saudi Arabia. Traditional healing practices and religious beliefs may discourage individuals from seeking modern medical care, leading to delays in diagnosis and treatment. Moreover, financial constraints pose a significant barrier to accessing healthcare services, as many rural residents struggle to afford the cost of medical treatment and medications [2].

Geographical isolation is another key factor that limits access to healthcare in rural Saudi Arabia. Many remote villages lack adequate transportation infrastructure, making it difficult for residents to travel to healthcare facilities located in urban centers. As a result, individuals in these areas often resort to self-medication or delay seeking care until their condition worsens [3].

To address these barriers, targeted interventions are needed to improve healthcare access in rural Saudi Arabia. This may include expanding healthcare infrastructure, incentivizing healthcare professionals to work in rural areas, raising awareness about the importance of seeking timely medical care, and providing financial assistance to low-income individuals. By addressing these challenges, policymakers and healthcare providers can help ensure that all residents of Saudi Arabia have equitable access to quality healthcare services [4].

Healthcare Infrastructure in Rural Saudi Arabia:

Healthcare infrastructure plays a crucial role in ensuring the well-being of individuals in any society. In Saudi Arabia, like many other countries, there is a significant disparity in healthcare services between urban and rural areas. While urban centers boast state-of-the-art hospitals and clinics, rural areas often lack access to basic healthcare facilities [2].

Rural areas in Saudi Arabia are characterized by their remote locations, sparse populations, and limited access to healthcare facilities. As a result, residents in these areas often face challenges in

accessing medical care, leading to poor health outcomes and increased mortality rates. The lack of healthcare infrastructure in rural Saudi Arabia is a pressing issue that needs to be addressed in order to ensure the well-being of all citizens [5].

One of the main challenges faced by residents in rural Saudi Arabia is the limited availability of healthcare facilities. Many rural areas lack hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies, forcing residents to travel long distances to receive medical care. This lack of access to healthcare services can have serious consequences, especially in emergency situations where timely medical intervention is crucial [6].

Furthermore, the shortage of healthcare professionals in rural areas exacerbates the problem. Many doctors and nurses prefer to work in urban centers where there are better career opportunities and higher salaries. As a result, rural areas are often understaffed, leading to longer wait times and lower quality of care for residents [4].

In response to these challenges, the Saudi government has implemented various initiatives to improve healthcare infrastructure in rural areas. One of the key initiatives is the establishment of primary healthcare centers in remote villages and towns. These centers provide basic medical services, preventive care, and health education to residents, helping to improve access to healthcare services in rural areas [7].

Additionally, the government has launched telemedicine programs to connect rural residents with healthcare professionals in urban centers. Through telemedicine, residents can receive medical advice, consultations, and even prescriptions without having to travel long distances. This has proven to be a cost-effective and efficient way to improve access to healthcare services in rural areas [8].

Despite these efforts, more needs to be done to address the healthcare infrastructure in rural Saudi Arabia. Investments in building more hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies in rural areas are essential to ensure that all residents have access to quality healthcare services. Furthermore, efforts should be made to attract and retain healthcare professionals in rural areas through incentives such as higher salaries, professional development opportunities, and improved working conditions [6].

The healthcare infrastructure in rural Saudi Arabia faces significant challenges, including limited access to healthcare facilities and shortage of healthcare professionals. While the government has taken steps to improve healthcare services in rural areas, more needs to be done to ensure that all residents have access to quality medical care. By

investing in healthcare infrastructure, attracting and retaining healthcare professionals, and implementing innovative solutions such as telemedicine, rural Saudi Arabia can improve the well-being of its residents and reduce health disparities between urban and rural areas [9].

Shortage of Healthcare Professionals:

In recent years, Saudi Arabia has been facing a significant shortage of healthcare professionals in rural areas. This shortage has become a major concern for the government and healthcare authorities, as it poses a serious threat to the quality and accessibility of healthcare services in these regions. In this essay, we will explore the reasons behind the shortage of healthcare professionals in rural Saudi Arabia and discuss the potential solutions to this pressing issue [10].

There are several factors contributing to the shortage of healthcare professionals in rural Saudi Arabia. One of the main reasons is the lack of incentives for healthcare professionals to work in rural areas. Many healthcare professionals prefer to work in urban areas where they can access better facilities, higher salaries, and more opportunities for career advancement. As a result, rural areas are left with limited healthcare resources, leading to inadequate healthcare services for the local population [11].

Another factor contributing to the shortage of healthcare professionals in rural Saudi Arabia is the lack of educational and training opportunities for aspiring healthcare professionals in these regions. Many healthcare professionals in rural areas face challenges in accessing quality education and training programs, which hinders their ability to acquire the necessary skills and qualifications to practice in the healthcare field. This lack of educational opportunities further exacerbates the shortage of healthcare professionals in rural areas [11].

Additionally, the limited infrastructure and resources in rural areas also play a role in the shortage of healthcare professionals. Many healthcare facilities in rural Saudi Arabia lack basic amenities and medical equipment, making it difficult for healthcare professionals to provide quality care to patients. This lack of infrastructure and resources discourages healthcare professionals from working in rural areas, further contributing to the shortage of healthcare professionals in these regions [10].

To address the shortage of healthcare professionals in rural Saudi Arabia, several measures can be taken. One possible solution is to provide incentives for healthcare professionals to work in

rural areas. This could include offering higher salaries, providing housing and transportation allowances, and offering opportunities for career advancement. By providing incentives for healthcare professionals to work in rural areas, the government and healthcare authorities can attract more healthcare professionals to these regions and improve access to healthcare services for the local population [12].

Another solution is to improve educational and training opportunities for aspiring healthcare professionals in rural areas. This could involve establishing more healthcare education and training programs in rural regions, providing scholarships and financial assistance to aspiring healthcare professionals, and offering mentorship and support programs to help them succeed in their careers. By improving educational and training opportunities for healthcare professionals in rural areas, the government can help address the shortage of healthcare professionals and ensure a steady supply of qualified healthcare workers in these regions [12].

Furthermore, investing in infrastructure and resources in rural healthcare facilities is essential to attract and retain healthcare professionals in rural Saudi Arabia. By upgrading healthcare facilities, providing essential medical equipment, and improving access to basic amenities, the government can create a more conducive working environment for healthcare professionals in rural areas. This will not only help address the shortage of healthcare professionals but also improve the quality of healthcare services for the local population [13].

The shortage of healthcare professionals in rural Saudi Arabia is a pressing issue that requires immediate attention and action. By addressing the factors contributing to this shortage and implementing potential solutions, the government and healthcare authorities can improve access to healthcare services in rural areas and ensure the well-being of the local population. It is essential to prioritize the recruitment, training, and retention of healthcare professionals in rural regions to address this critical issue and enhance the healthcare system in Saudi Arabia [13].

Cultural Barriers to Healthcare Access:

Healthcare access is a fundamental human right that should be available to all individuals regardless of their cultural background or geographical location. However, in rural Saudi Arabia, there are significant cultural barriers that hinder access to healthcare services for many residents. These barriers are deeply rooted in the

traditional beliefs and practices of the local population, making it difficult for individuals to seek and receive the medical care they need [14]. One of the main cultural barriers to healthcare access in rural Saudi Arabia is the strong influence of traditional healing practices. Many individuals in rural communities rely on traditional healers and herbal remedies to treat their ailments, rather than seeking medical treatment from trained healthcare professionals. This can lead to delays in diagnosis and treatment, as well as the worsening of health conditions that could have been easily treated by modern medicine [14].

Another cultural barrier to healthcare access in rural Saudi Arabia is the stigma surrounding certain health issues, particularly mental health. Mental health disorders are often seen as a sign of weakness or personal failure, leading many individuals to avoid seeking help for their mental health issues. This can have serious consequences for individuals who may be suffering from conditions such as depression or anxiety, as they are unable to access the necessary treatment and support [15].

Furthermore, gender norms and restrictions can also pose a barrier to healthcare access in rural Saudi Arabia. In many rural communities, women may face challenges in accessing healthcare services due to cultural norms that restrict their mobility and autonomy. This can prevent women from seeking medical care for themselves or their families, leading to a lack of preventive care and early intervention for health issues [15].

Additionally, language barriers can also hinder healthcare access in rural Saudi Arabia. Many healthcare facilities in rural areas may not have adequate translation services or staff who can communicate effectively with non-Arabic speakers. This can make it difficult for individuals from minority ethnic groups or non-Arabic speaking backgrounds to access healthcare services and understand their medical treatment options [16].

In order to address these cultural barriers to healthcare access in rural Saudi Arabia, it is essential to implement culturally sensitive healthcare initiatives that take into account the beliefs and practices of the local population. This may involve training healthcare professionals to work effectively with traditional healers, providing education and awareness programs on mental health issues, and ensuring that healthcare facilities are equipped to accommodate the needs of diverse patient populations [14].

Furthermore, efforts should be made to empower women in rural communities to access healthcare

services and make informed decisions about their health. This may involve providing transportation services for women to access healthcare facilities, as well as implementing outreach programs to educate women about the importance of preventive care and regular health screenings [16].

Overall, addressing cultural barriers to healthcare access in rural Saudi Arabia requires a multi-faceted approach that takes into account the unique cultural and social dynamics of the local population. By working collaboratively with community leaders, healthcare professionals, and policymakers, it is possible to overcome these barriers and ensure that all individuals have access to the healthcare services they need to lead healthy and fulfilling lives [17].

Financial Constraints:

Access to healthcare is a fundamental human right that is essential for maintaining the well-being of individuals and communities. However, in rural areas of Saudi Arabia, financial constraints often act as a barrier to accessing healthcare services. One of the primary financial constraints to healthcare access in rural Saudi Arabia is the high cost of healthcare services. Due to the limited availability of healthcare facilities in rural areas, individuals often have to travel long distances to access medical care. This not only incurs transportation costs but also results in lost wages for individuals who have to take time off work to seek medical treatment. Additionally, the cost of medical consultations, diagnostic tests, and medications can be prohibitively expensive for individuals living in rural areas, many of whom may already be struggling to make ends meet [18]. Another financial constraint to healthcare access in rural Saudi Arabia is the lack of health insurance coverage. While the Saudi government provides healthcare services through its public healthcare system, coverage is often limited in rural areas. Many individuals in rural areas do not have health insurance and are forced to pay out of pocket for medical expenses. This can place a significant financial burden on individuals and families, especially those with chronic health conditions that require ongoing medical care [19].

Furthermore, the lack of healthcare infrastructure in rural Saudi Arabia exacerbates financial constraints to healthcare access. In many rural areas, there is a shortage of healthcare facilities, medical professionals, and essential medical equipment. This forces individuals to seek medical care in urban centers, where healthcare services are often more expensive. Additionally, the limited availability of healthcare facilities in rural areas

can result in long wait times for medical appointments and treatments, further delaying access to care for individuals in need [20].

In order to address the financial constraints to healthcare access in rural Saudi Arabia, several potential solutions can be considered. One possible solution is to expand health insurance coverage to include individuals living in rural areas. By providing affordable health insurance to rural residents, individuals can access healthcare services without incurring significant out-of-pocket expenses. Additionally, the Saudi government can invest in expanding healthcare infrastructure in rural areas, including building new healthcare facilities, hiring more medical professionals, and equipping healthcare facilities with essential medical equipment. This would help to improve access to healthcare services for individuals living in rural areas and reduce the financial burden of seeking medical care in urban centers [21].

Financial constraints are a significant barrier to healthcare access in rural Saudi Arabia. High healthcare costs, lack of health insurance coverage, and limited healthcare infrastructure all contribute to the challenges faced by individuals seeking medical care in rural areas. By implementing solutions such as expanding health insurance coverage and investing in healthcare infrastructure, the Saudi government can help to improve access to healthcare services for individuals living in rural areas and ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to receive the medical care they need to lead healthy and productive lives [22].

Geographical Isolation:

Geographical isolation is a significant barrier to healthcare access in Saudi Arabia, a country known for its vast and diverse landscape. With its expansive deserts, rugged mountains, and remote rural areas, many residents face challenges in accessing essential healthcare services. This issue is particularly prevalent in rural and underserved communities, where individuals may have limited access to healthcare facilities and providers due to their isolated locations [23].

One of the primary reasons for geographical isolation as a barrier to healthcare access in Saudi Arabia is the uneven distribution of healthcare facilities across the country. While urban areas such as Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam have well-equipped hospitals and clinics, rural and remote communities often lack access to even basic healthcare services. This disparity in healthcare infrastructure leaves many residents in isolated areas without timely access to medical care,

leading to delays in diagnosis and treatment of health conditions [24].

In addition to the uneven distribution of healthcare facilities, the challenging terrain of Saudi Arabia poses a logistical challenge for residents in remote areas seeking healthcare services. Traveling long distances to reach the nearest healthcare facility can be time-consuming and costly, particularly for individuals who rely on public transportation or have limited access to private vehicles. In some cases, patients may have to travel for hours or even days to receive medical care, which can result in delays in seeking treatment and exacerbate health conditions [25].

Moreover, the lack of healthcare providers in remote areas further compounds the issue of geographical isolation as a barrier to healthcare access in Saudi Arabia. Many healthcare professionals prefer to work in urban areas where there are more opportunities for career advancement and access to resources. As a result, rural and underserved communities often face shortages of doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals, making it difficult for residents to receive timely and quality care [26].

To address the issue of geographical isolation as a barrier to healthcare access in Saudi Arabia, several strategies can be implemented. One approach is to invest in telemedicine and mobile healthcare services, which can help bridge the gap between healthcare providers and patients in remote areas. By utilizing technology such as video consultations and remote monitoring devices, healthcare professionals can deliver care to patients in isolated areas without the need for them to travel long distances [27].

Additionally, efforts should be made to improve the infrastructure and transportation networks in rural and remote areas to facilitate access to healthcare services. This may involve building new healthcare facilities, expanding existing ones, and providing incentives for healthcare professionals to work in underserved communities. By addressing the root causes of geographical isolation, such as inadequate infrastructure and healthcare workforce shortages, Saudi Arabia can improve healthcare access for all residents, regardless of their location [28].

Geographical isolation is a significant barrier to healthcare access in Saudi Arabia, particularly for residents in rural and remote areas. By addressing the uneven distribution of healthcare facilities, improving transportation networks, and investing in telemedicine services, the country can overcome this challenge and ensure that all residents have access to timely and quality healthcare services. By

prioritizing healthcare access for all, Saudi Arabia can improve the health outcomes and well-being of its population [25].

Interventions to Improve Healthcare Access:

Healthcare access is a critical issue that affects individuals and communities worldwide. In Saudi Arabia, access to healthcare services has been a major concern for many years. Despite significant improvements in healthcare infrastructure and services in recent years, there are still challenges that need to be addressed to ensure that all residents have equal access to quality healthcare. In this essay, we will explore some of the interventions that have been implemented to improve healthcare access in Saudi Arabia [24].

• Improving Primary Healthcare Services

One of the key interventions to improve healthcare access in Saudi Arabia has been the expansion of primary healthcare services. Primary healthcare plays a crucial role in preventing and managing diseases, as well as promoting overall health and well-being. In recent years, the Saudi government has invested heavily in expanding primary healthcare facilities and services across the country. This includes the establishment of new clinics, the recruitment of more healthcare professionals, and the implementation of telemedicine services to reach remote and underserved areas [22].

• Health Insurance Coverage

Another important intervention to improve healthcare access in Saudi Arabia has been the expansion of health insurance coverage. In the past, many residents in Saudi Arabia did not have access to health insurance, which made it difficult for them to afford healthcare services. However, in recent years, the Saudi government has introduced mandatory health insurance for all residents, which has significantly increased access to healthcare services. This has helped to reduce out-of-pocket expenses for healthcare services and has ensured that all residents have access to essential healthcare services [27].

• Telemedicine and Telehealth Services

In recent years, telemedicine and telehealth services have emerged as important interventions to improve healthcare access in Saudi Arabia. Telemedicine allows patients to consult with healthcare providers remotely, which can be particularly beneficial for residents in remote or underserved areas. Telehealth services also enable healthcare providers to monitor and manage

chronic conditions more effectively, as well as provide education and support to patients. The Saudi government has invested in expanding telemedicine and telehealth services to improve access to healthcare services for all residents [28].

• Community Health Initiatives

Community health initiatives have also played a key role in improving healthcare access in Saudi Arabia. These initiatives focus on promoting health and well-being at the community level, as well as addressing social determinants of health that can impact access to healthcare services. Community health initiatives include health education programs, disease prevention campaigns, and partnerships with local organizations to improve access to healthcare services. By engaging with communities and addressing their specific healthcare needs, these initiatives have helped to improve healthcare access for residents in Saudi Arabia [29].

Conclusion:

Improving healthcare access in Saudi Arabia is a complex and ongoing process that requires a multi-faceted approach. By expanding primary healthcare services, increasing health insurance coverage, implementing telemedicine and telehealth services, and engaging with communities through health initiatives, significant progress has been made in improving access to healthcare services for all residents. However, there is still work to be done to ensure that all residents in Saudi Arabia have equal access to quality healthcare. By continuing to invest in healthcare infrastructure and services, as well as addressing social determinants of health, Saudi Arabia can further improve healthcare access and outcomes for its residents.

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