

Impact of Mohalla Clinic on Revolutionizing Women's Healthcare in Delhi

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Abstract

This paper analyses the role of the Aam Aadmi Mohalla Clinic in improving women's healthcare in Delhi and how they cater to the demands of women patients. Aam Aadmi Mohalla Clinic provides basic services in underserved areas without any fees in a responsive manner. This programme has gained significant attention nationally and internationally, particularly regarding primary health care. So many other states in India are planning to implement this kind of programme for the improvement of their healthcare system. This paper covers the facilities provided by Mohalla Clinic and the women's patients' experience in getting benefits from Mohalla Clinic. This paper aims to explore and analyze the role of Mohalla Clinics in enhancing women's healthcare focusing on how these Mohalla clinics have made women's healthcare easy to access by providing service near the neighborhoods. This study shows that, ultimately, there is a lack of awareness among women about the facilities provided by Mohalla Clinic and these clinics are not well equipped, most of the Mohalla Clinics are functioning under the porta cabins. This paper also investigates the challenges faced by Mohalla Clinics in tackling gender-specific health issues and suggests some possible solutions to improve their effectiveness in catering to women's healthcare needs.

Keywords: Women's Healthcare, Primary Healthcare, Aam Aadmi Mohalla Clinic, Healthcare system, Government of Delhi

INTRODUCTION

The social values and norms existing within the patriarchal setup of society affect the health of women in various ways. Forces such as globalization and fundamentalism marked by unemployment, depleting wages, rising health care costs, and hazardous working and living environments have played a significant role in further aggravating the social and economic plight of women. The high cost of medicines and diagnostics makes healthcare costs rapidly rising and most of the time it forces patients to opt for borrowings, the sale of some physical assets to bear healthcare costs. According to a study around 29.9% of rural and 18.2 % of urban population depends on borrowings for their medical treatment.¹ In such a situation, Mohalla Clinics works as a protective shield against primary health care. Getting medical facilities from Mohalla Clinics free of cost not only brings peace of mind to the people but also reduces the financial burden.

In India, class, caste, and religion are intertwined in such complex ways that they increase the subordination of women. These subtle realities determine how women should live their lives. Indian women are the most vulnerable members of society. They are at most commonly risk of malnutrition, stunting, anemia, urinary and menstrual disorders, and pregnancy-related complications. This is due to the restrictive societal mentality which leads to inequalities based on gender discrimination, such as lack of

education and inadequate opportunities. Unfortunately, many women's health conditions go undiagnosed due to ignorance, low literacy, inability to make informed decisions, and poor economic status, which limits women's lives. Because of these complex situations, it is very important to consider the health needs of women in the socio-political and economic framework.

Women's healthcare is a subject of big concern to which government should make a common agenda to ensure that marginalized women are addressed in particular to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3, health and well-being.² Mohalla Clinics in Delhi is indeed a significant step towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No.3, which is to assure everyone's well-being and promote it at all ages. These clinics contribute to several key targets and indicators outlined within SDG 3 by addressing healthcare disparities, promoting preventive care, and improving overall health outcomes.

The scarcity of accessibility and availability of women's healthcare has been recognized as a major drawback for service utilization. In a nation like India, there is a significant disparity between supply and demand of healthcare services especially for women, and this gap is cited as a reason there is a lack of accessibility and availability to healthcare services by women. Decreasing number in getting health services has continuously been blamed on women, for their unawareness, their ignoring behavior towards their health, their education level, and their cultural and societal beliefs, but according to this study, women's perceptions towards health care services provided by the government reveals that distance from the health care centers are important factors in women's access to health care services.

The ratio of males to females seeking health care treatment at the center was found to be highly differentiated five to one respectively. It has been observed that Indian women tend to neglect their illness until they become too sick to attend to their normal chores because of their family responsibility and lack of awareness towards health education. Poverty among urban women and the lack of women-centered health services available at centers are the main reason for decreasing number of medical treatments by women. However, in the southwest district of Delhi health services are easily accessible to women, because with the support of Mohalla Clinics health services are available within a two to three Km. distance. The accessibility of the services provided by Mohalla Clinic is relatively better as compared to other states in India.

In response to the growing demand for women's healthcare, this paper attempts to provide an overview of women's health situation in Delhi. In doing so, we analyze and examine the health system for women in Delhi, challenges faced by women in health care, and the impact of Mohalla Clinics on Women's healthcare.

HEALTH SYSTEM FOR WOMEN IN DELHI

Women's health is a much-considered factor that plays a critical role in the well-being of women. The last few years have seen a rise in the importance of women's healthcare in India. There are so many chronic health problems that affect men and women in the same way, but certain health problems only affect women who must be considered at the right time. Women's health in Delhi can easily be evaluated by the nutritional and socio-economic level of women. Concerning women's nutritional status, particularly in marginalized areas of Delhi, is a matter that should be taken seriously.

The health care system for women in Delhi is mainly provided at three levels primary, non-primary and secondary, and tertiary levels. Primary healthcare is provided through the dispensary, Secondary healthcare is provided through multi-specialty big hospitals, and last but not least third level and tertiary healthcare are provided by super-specialty like Max and Medanta Hospitals.

The Government of Delhi had taken several steps toward revolutionizing women's health, including health education, providing access to healthcare, and free transport services for women. Focusing on public healthcare Aam Aadmi Party established the Mohalla Clinics programme. These clinics have helped to solve the issue of accessibility of healthcare by marginalized groups of society, particularly women. A think tank committee studies the Mohalla Clinic and found that 85% of the patients going to these clinics are women.³

CONCEPT OF MOHALLA CLINIC IN DELHI

In 2015, the Delhi Govt. launched the Mohalla Clinic program, also known as a community clinic, as a response to the growing healthcare needs of people in urban areas. The program was modeled on the concept of community-based healthcare services and aimed to give neighborhood residents free access to basic healthcare services. Most of the Mohalla Clinics are managed by licensed physicians and healthcare professionals and are located in temporary spaces like schools and community centres.⁴

Mohalla Clinic was established to fulfill the demand and supply of health facilities which was highly skewed. Mohalla Clinics perfectly fits these criteria because they are neighborhood clinics that provide doorstep health care services. The price of healthcare services is another constraint to the lack of healthcare accessibility. Even though health care services provided by the government are generally free of cost but women getting health care at these facilities do occur costs on medicines and travel. But when we talk about the Mohalla Clinic Centres they are cost and travel-friendly because these are available at the doorstep of people. Mohalla Clinic is not only cost and travel-friendly but fulfills the need for women doctors and nurses and also establishes norms for the doctor-patient relationship.

To provide primary health care services nearby to the people, especially for the marginalized section of society, the Aam Aadmi Party promised to set up Mohalla Clinics Centres in the neighborhood of the patients. To fulfill this promise Government of Delhi established the Mohalla Clinic programme in 2015. This programme aimed to provide access to free pathology tests, diagnostic services, medications, and medical consultations to the urban poor. Ten thousand low-income and underprivileged residents are to be served by a single Mohalla clinic within a two to three-kilometer radius.⁵

Each Mohalla Clinic includes a doctor, a nurse, a pharmacist, and a laboratory technician. These clinics provide comprehensive health packages including outpatient consultation, free treatment, free, medicine, immunization, family planning, referral, and counseling services. In a broader sense, there are options to meet specialists such as gynecologists and ophthalmologists once a week.

MAIN OBJECTIVES OF MOHALLA CLINIC

Apart from that the Aam Aadmi Mohalla Clinics' two main objectives are to lessen the strain on hospitals and to decrease crowding. Mohalla clinics are based on a zero-cost-to-community model in which free consultation, free medicine, free medical tests, and free treatment of disease are provided to the urban poor. There are currently 520 Mohalla clinics in Delhi that provide patients with free primary health care services, including 212 various kinds of medical tests. More than 60,000 patients per day are treated in these Mohalla clinics, according to data from the Delhi government.⁶

Mohalla Clinic initiatives are an important step towards improving healthcare access and realizing the Right to health for all residents of Delhi, as they provide basic healthcare services to people who might otherwise not have access to them. Mohalla clinics are helping to bridge the gap in healthcare access and improve health outcomes for people in Delhi.

Aam Aadmi Mohalla Clinics aimed to implement a major change from a centralized three-tier system to a more decentralized four-tier structure:

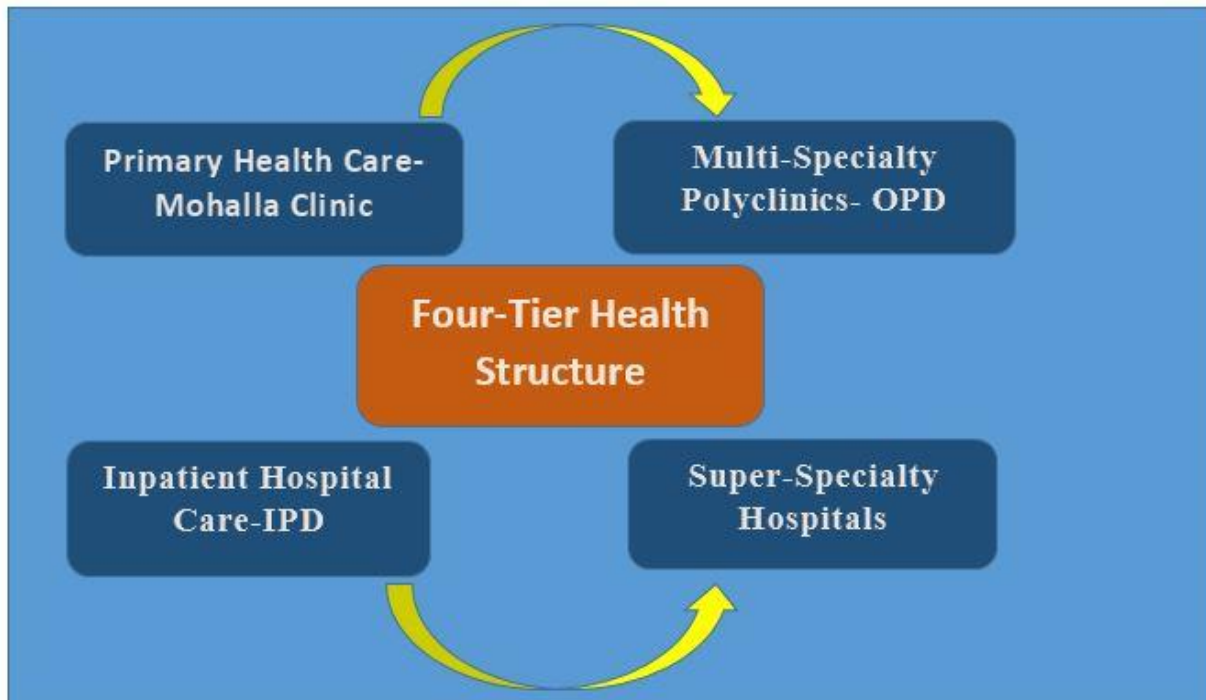


Figure 1. Four-Tier Health Structure in Delhi (Source- Created by the Author)

- Primary health care: Aam Aadmi Mohalla Clinic
- Multi-specialty polyclinics provide secondary healthcare and outpatient department (OPD) services.
- Inpatient hospital care (IPD): multispecialty facilities
- Super-specialty hospitals are part of tertiary healthcare.⁷

DELHI GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO ENSURE HEALTH FACILITIES TO WOMEN

In the 21st Century, women still feel shy in discussing their health problems with male doctors, they prefer female doctors for their treatment. To make women comfortable and meet the needs of women's health care the Govt. of Delhi has promised to set up 100 Mahila Mohalla clinics across Delhi of which four clinics were inaugurated in different locations. This will be completely employed by women staff. The primary goal of Mahila Mohalla Clinics is to give free gynecological and pediatric medical services -- exclusively to women and girls.

Delhi the heart of India now has Mahila Mohalla Clinics for women where they will be able to receive free access to gynecological care, medical test, and medications. Mahila Mohalla Clinics is one of the key initiatives of the Delhi Government and is aimed at revolutionizing Women's Healthcare in Delhi.

According to a study of convalescent patient appointments at each significant tertiary care hospital in Delhi, women experience "extensive gender discrimination" regarding access to healthcare. Women who are younger than 30 years of age, older than 60 or above, and who live farthest from the hospital are more likely to forgo medical care.⁸

WOMEN'S ACCESSIBILITY TO MOHALLA CLINIC

Biases in providing public healthcare services to people are normal in countries like India and especially in rural areas based on caste, class, economic status, and gender basis. In the Indian healthcare system

where gender disparities are deeply entrenched, women have always been neglected by policymakers and service providers. Despite the change in the condition of women in modern times and many steps taken by the government for women's health, the country is still far behind in providing adequate healthcare services for women. India is still struggling to provide better healthcare services to women at rural as well as urban levels.

Women empowerment in the healthcare sector of India does not fit practically because so many Indian women are still facing a lot of challenges in accessing healthcare services. We all know about the challenges and many pieces of literature mentioned it but it is not being followed in health-related services for women.

A study on Mohalla Clinics reveals that Mohalla Clinics are playing an important role in providing better health services to women as the availability of these clinics near to their communities makes it easy for women in particular to have hassle-free access to healthcare and motivates them to visit the clinic on time for any kind of minor/major ailments. For women who are financially dependent on their family or spouse, it becomes difficult for them to reach a hospital or health center for a minor illness. Also, the women of the house usually do not get time to wait for long in the hospitals as they have to do household chores and therefore only go to the hospital when there is a serious illness. However, with the advent of Mohalla clinics in the neighborhood, women are assured of independently accessing the facility and availing of health services so that any major ailments are nipped in the bud. Hence, Mohalla Clinic has indirectly helped in women's medical empowerment.⁹

HOW DOES URBAN LIFE AFFECT WOMEN'S HEALTH?

Urban life of women can have both positive and negative effects on women's health. While urban areas offer increased access to healthcare services, education, and economic opportunities, they also present unique challenges that can impact women's physical, mental, and social well-being.

In comparison to rural women urban women are more likely to be living in a nuclear family rather than a joint family. Urban women who live in nuclear families do not have anyone to help them with household work and take care of their health. The fast-paced urban lifestyle can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and mental health challenges for women. Balancing work, family responsibilities, and personal aspirations have been overwhelming for women this can lead to burnout and negatively impact both physical and mental health. Urban women may lead more sedentary lives due to desk jobs, long commutes, and limited opportunities for physical activity. This can contribute to obesity, cardiovascular issues, and other lifestyle-related diseases. Urban areas may have higher rates of gender-based violence, including domestic abuse and harassment. Fear of violence can impact women's mental health and limit their ability to move freely.¹⁰

Overcrowded living conditions, lack of sanitation facilities, and poor quality housing negatively impact women's health and well-being. Urban environments can provide easy access to fast food and processed foods, which can lead to poor dietary habits and an increased risk of obesity, diabetes, and other chronic diseases. Despite the urban environment, women can experience social isolation due to busy lifestyles, lack of community engagement, and reliance on digital communication. Urban areas can exacerbate existing inequalities, with marginalized women facing additional challenges due to a lack of access to quality health care, education, and employment opportunities.

CHALLENGES TO WOMEN’S HEALTHCARE IN DELHI

Women in Delhi have several obstacles while trying to obtain healthcare facilities. Among the present-day difficulties, some are:

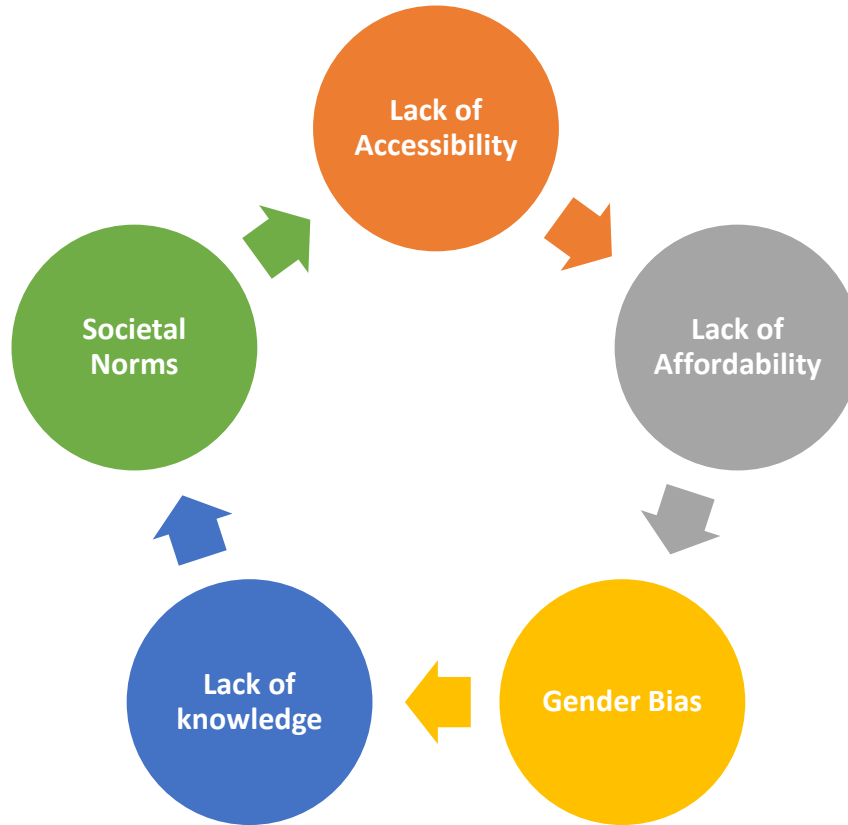


Figure 2. Challenges to Women’s Healthcare (Source- Created by the Author)

Lack of accessibility: Women in remote areas frequently have trouble getting to medical facilities. They might have to travel a great distance to the nearest healthcare facility, which can be challenging and expensive.

Lack of affordability: Healthcare costs in India can be high, making it possible for many women to be unable to pay for such costs. This is particularly true for women who come from low-income families.

Gender bias: Women may experience prejudice and discrimination in healthcare settings, which can keep them from getting the care they need. This may involve unfavorable attitudes on the part of healthcare professionals as well as a lack of comprehension of problems relating to women's health.

Lack of knowledge: Many Indian women may be unaware of their rights and the healthcare options available to them. This may keep individuals from seeking assistance when they do and cause treatment to be delayed.

Societal Norms: Societal norms can act as significant barriers for women in accessing health facilities and receiving proper healthcare. These norms often stem from traditional beliefs, cultural practices, and gender roles that dictate the roles and expectations of women within a given society.

HOW ARE MOHALLA CLINICS DISTINCT FROM TRADITIONAL PRIMARY HEALTHCARE CENTRES?

Proximity and Accessibility: Mohalla Clinics are strategically located within communities, often in densely populated urban areas. Their proximity to residential neighborhoods ensures easy access for resid-

ents, eliminating the need for long travels to reach healthcare facilities.

Reduced Waiting Times: Mohalla Clinics are designed to handle a relatively smaller patient load compared to larger hospitals or healthcare centers. This design feature helps reduce waiting times, ensuring that patients receive prompt attention and care.

Reduced Financial Barriers: Many Mohalla Clinics offer free or low-cost consultations, medications, and diagnostics, making healthcare services more accessible and affordable, especially for low-income communities.

Focus on Preventive Care: While traditional healthcare centers often focus on treating illnesses, Mohalla Clinics emphasize preventive care and health education. They conduct awareness campaigns, workshops, and screenings to promote healthy behaviors and early detection of health issues.

Gender-Sensitive Services: Mohalla Clinics recognize the specific healthcare needs of women and offer services related to maternal health, family planning, and reproductive health. This contributes to addressing gender disparities in healthcare access.

Empowerment and Participation: By involving the local community in healthcare decisions and initiatives, Mohalla Clinics empower residents to take an active role in their health and the health of their neighbors.¹¹

IMPACT OF MOHALLA CLINICS ON IMPROVING WOMEN'S HEALTHCARE

The Mohalla Clinics in Delhi have had a significant impact on women's health by improving access to quality healthcare services, particularly for women from marginalized communities. These community-based primary healthcare centers have addressed various barriers that women faced in accessing medical care, leading to positive outcomes in terms of health awareness, preventive care, and overall well-being. Here are some of the key impacts of Mohalla Clinics on women's healthcare:

- **Improved Access to Healthcare:** Due to the distance, expense, and lack of knowledge, many women, particularly those from low-income neighborhoods and marginalized populations, frequently had difficulty accessing healthcare services. Women now have more convenient access to necessary healthcare services without having to make extensive travel arrangements or incur significant financial burdens thanks to the creation of Mohalla Clinics near villages.
- **Antenatal and Maternal Care:** Mohalla Clinics play a crucial role in providing antenatal and maternal care services. Pregnant women can receive regular check-ups, advice on nutrition, and guidance on proper prenatal care. This has contributed to reducing maternal mortality rates by ensuring early detection and management of pregnancy-related complications.
- **Reproductive Health Services:** Women can receive counseling, contraceptives, and family planning advice at Mohalla Clinics. This empowers women to make informed decisions about their reproductive health, helping them manage family planning effectively and prevent unintended pregnancies.
- **Preventive Care and Health Education:** Mohalla Clinics not only treat illnesses but also focus on preventive care and health education. This includes awareness campaigns on topics such as immunizations, breastfeeding, menstrual hygiene, and nutrition. By providing information and resources, the clinics empower women to make healthier choices and take proactive steps toward their well-being.
- **Cervical Cancer Screening:** Some Mohalla Clinics offer cervical cancer screening services. Regular screenings and early detection of cervical cancer play a critical role in reducing mortality rates associated with this disease.

- **Community Engagement:** Mohalla Clinics engage with the local community to understand their specific healthcare needs. This approach ensures that the services provided are tailored to the requirements of women in the area, fostering a sense of trust and participation.
- **Reduced Out-of-Pocket Expenditure:** For many women, especially those from lower-income backgrounds, Mohalla Clinics have significantly reduced the financial burden associated with seeking healthcare. Free or low-cost consultations and medications contribute to women accessing necessary care without worrying about high medical expenses.
- **Empowerment and Agency:** Accessible healthcare services provided by Mohalla Clinics empower women to take control of their health. By offering a safe and comfortable environment, these clinics encourage women to discuss their health concerns openly and seek appropriate medical advice.
- **Improved Health Indicators:** The presence of Mohalla Clinics has likely contributed to improved health indicators for women in Delhi, including increased rates of immunization, better maternal and child health outcomes, and enhanced awareness of health-related issues.
- **Reduced Health Disparities:** Urban areas can magnify existing inequalities, with marginalized women facing additional challenges due to a lack of access to quality healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. Mohalla Clinics have played a role in reducing health disparities among different socioeconomic groups by ensuring that quality healthcare services are available to all, regardless of their background or income level.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The study has found people's opinions on Mohalla Clinic, they said that My Mohalla My Clinic, Mohalla Clinic is like a Sanjeevni Booti, it is not less than a boon, there is no fixed boundary patients can avail the services anytime and anywhere and these clinics are available in a range of 500 meters which comes within walking distance from the patient's door.

Women beyond working age are more likely to use free- or low-cost proximate health facilities, as their mobility and income reduce and dependency on the other members increases and the attendance at Mohalla Clinics with age shows a positive association.¹² Therefore, this community-based clinic can be considered empowering for the elderly women population, especially women from marginalized groups of society, who have limited mobility and decision-making power. There were found a few personal data reported where a doctor at Mohalla Clinics has been considered as part of the community and his/her mediation/advice has been sought in addressing social health issues such as gender-based violence.

The study also found that widowed women and women who are living without their husbands in Delhi visit Mohalla clinics regularly. It can be said that Mohalla clinics located near urban slums have played an important role in mobilizing women. However, in some of the areas studied, women's attendance at Mohalla clinics was reported to be low because women did not feel comfortable taking their treatment to male doctors. Hence, this barrier resulted in the underutilization of health services. That is why the number of women beneficiaries can be increased by calling a woman doctor once or twice a week, to make women comfortable in Mohalla Clinic.¹³

To solve the issue of the availability of Female doctors in Mohalla Clinics Chief Minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal make a promise for opening 100 Mahila Mohalla Clinics across Delhi which few Mahila Mohalla Clinics have been already established in different localities. These clinics have only female staff which makes women comfortable in their treatment.

The 'Mohalla' clinic programme appears to be an ambitious step but it has a weak healthcare plan; however, it has the potential to address the basic healthcare needs of the urban population. Initial assessment of the Mohalla Clinic program shows that the Mohalla Clinics are having a positive impact on the women's health. Delhi government and the Government of India need to improve the operation and functioning of this clinic and scale it up to the entire Delhi. With proper infrastructure and well-managed staff, the 'Mohalla' clinic can contribute towards improving primary health care and Universal Health Coverage of women and will be a model for other Indian states too.

CONCLUSION

Good health is a key parameter that contributes to human well-being and the economic development of society. Adequate health care for women will help them to serve as productive members of society to develop healthy generations. Mohalla clinics are addressing various barriers to access to health services for women, such as solving the geographical problem by providing clinic facilities in the community, solving the financial problem by providing free medicines and diagnostic services, and providing health services by women doctors. To solve social problems by providing services. Apart from this, making provision for the establishment of Mahila Mohalla Clinic for the convenience of women.

Mohalla Clinics perfectly align closely with SDG 3 by addressing various health-related targets and indicators. Mohalla Clinic promotes equitable access to healthcare, preventive services, women's and child health, and gender-sensitive care, all of which are essential components of achieving universal health coverage and ensuring healthy lives for all within the framework of sustainable development goals.

Mohalla Clinics play a vital role in revolutionizing women's health by addressing various barriers and challenges they face in accessing healthcare services. These community-based healthcare centers focus on providing comprehensive and gender-sensitive services and promoting health awareness among women. Mohalla Clinics offer services that cater specifically to women's health needs, such as antenatal care, family planning, reproductive health counseling, and breast cancer screenings. By addressing these specific concerns, women feel more comfortable discussing and addressing their health issues.

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