Vol. 5 No. 1 (2026)

Pakistan Journal of Medical & Cardiological Review

https://pakjmcr.com/index.php/1/about

Online ISSN 3007-2387

Print ISSN 3007-2379

Risk Factors of Preterm Premature Rupture of Membranes among Pregnant Women Attending the Obstetrics and Gynecology Service at Abuali Sina Balkhi Teaching Hospital

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Keywords: PPROM, Preterm Premature Rupture of Membranes, Pregnancy, Infection, Preterm Birth, Maternal Health

Received on 01 April 2026

Accepted on 10 April 2026

Published on 21 April 2026

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Abstract

Preterm Premature Rupture of Membranes (PPROM) is a significant complication during pregnancy that can lead to preterm birth, intrauterine infections, and increased maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality. This study aimed to investigate the factors associated with the occurrence of PPROM among pregnant women attending Abuali Sina Balkhi Teaching Hospital. A descriptive-analytical design was employed involving 80 pregnant women. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and medical records and analyzed using descriptive statistics and the Chi-square test.

The findings revealed that the highest prevalence of PPROM was observed in women aged 20 to 29 years (47.5%). Additionally, 43.75% of the participants were illiterate. Urinary and genital infections were reported in 60% of the cases. Chi-square analysis indicated statistically significant associations between maternal age (P=0.037), educational level (P=0.014), urinary and genital infections (P=0.002), and history of abortion (P=0.009) with the occurrence of PPROM.

In conclusion, PPROM is a multifactorial condition, with infectious factors and low health literacy playing a particularly important role. Therefore, strengthening prenatal care, implementing infection screening, and improving pregnant women's awareness may play a crucial role in reducing the incidence of this complication.

Introduction

Preterm Premature Rupture of Membranes (PPROM) is a significant obstetric complication defined as the spontaneous rupture of fetal membranes before the onset of labor and prior to 37 weeks of gestation. This condition can lead to serious maternal and neonatal complications, including preterm birth, intrauterine infections, umbilical cord prolapse, and increased neonatal mortality. Therefore, identifying its risk factors is crucial for improving prenatal care (Cunningham et al., 2022).

Epidemiologically, PPROM occurs in approximately 2–3% of all pregnancies and accounts for about one-third of preterm deliveries. It represents a major challenge in healthcare systems of developing countries, where limited diagnostic and therapeutic resources may exacerbate its consequences. Studies have shown that multiple factors

contribute to the occurrence of this condition, including infectious, nutritional, social factors, and previous pregnancy histories (ACOG, 2020).
From a pathophysiological perspective, weaknesses in the collagen structure of fetal membranes, inflammation caused by intrauterine infections, and increased intrauterine pressure are among the primary mechanisms leading to PPROM. Additionally, factors such as smoking, vitamin C deficiency, first-trimester bleeding, and invasive procedures can further increase the risk of this condition (Goldenberg et al., 2018).
In developing countries such as Afghanistan, the prevalence of PPROM risk factors may be higher due to low health literacy, limited access to prenatal care services, and higher rates of genital infections. Therefore, a detailed investigation of risk factors in reputable healthcare centers, such as Abuali Sina Balkhi Teaching Hospital, can play an important role in identifying local patterns of this condition.
Accordingly, this study aims to investigate the risk factors of preterm premature rupture of membranes among women attending the Obstetrics and Gynecology Service at Abuali Sina Balkhi Teaching Hospital, providing a foundation for improving prevention programs, early detection, and reducing maternal and neonatal complications.

Problem Statement

Preterm Premature Rupture of Membranes (PPROM) is one of the most significant clinical challenges in obstetrics, defined as the rupture of fetal membranes before the onset of labor and prior to 37 completed weeks of gestation. This condition is a major contributor to preterm birth and can lead to serious complications such as intrauterine infection (chorioamnionitis), neonatal sepsis, umbilical cord prolapse, neonatal respiratory distress, and increased perinatal mortality (Cunningham et al., 2022).
Despite substantial advances in maternal and child healthcare, PPROM remains a major challenge in developing countries. In these settings, limited access to prenatal care, low health literacy, higher prevalence of genital infections, and socioeconomic challenges increase both the risk of PPROM and the severity of its outcomes (ACOG, 2020).
In Afghanistan, and particularly in healthcare centers such as Abuali Sina Balkhi Teaching Hospital, cases of preterm premature rupture of membranes are observed at notable rates; however, precise and systematic data on associated risk factors remain limited. In many instances, the diagnosis and management of PPROM occur without adequate knowledge of the underlying contributing factors, which may result in ineffective prevention and recurrent cases.
Moreover, the risk factors for PPROM are multifactorial, including infectious factors (urinary and genital infections), maternal factors (extremes of maternal age, multiparity), behavioral factors (smoking, poor nutrition), and factors related to previous pregnancy history. Nevertheless, the specific patterns of these risk factors may vary in local settings and require dedicated investigation (Goldenberg et al., 2018).
Therefore, the lack of comprehensive information regarding risk factors of PPROM among women attending Abuali Sina Balkhi Teaching Hospital represents a significant research gap. This study seeks to identify the associated risk factors to facilitate more effective prevention, early diagnosis, and reduction of maternal and neonatal complications.

Research Objectives

Main Objective:

To investigate the risk factors of Preterm Premature Rupture of Membranes (PPROM) among women attending the Obstetrics and Gynecology Service at Abuali Sina Balkhi Teaching Hospital.

Specific Objectives:

1. To examine the association between demographic factors (age, educational level, and socio-economic status) and the occurrence of PPROM.
2. To determine the role of obstetric factors (history of preterm delivery, previous abortions, and prior PPROM) in the development of this condition.
3. To evaluate the relationship between infectious and behavioral factors (urinary and genital infections, smoking, and poor nutrition) and the incidence of PPROM.

Research Methodology

This study is not a literature review but, if conducted in a clinical setting, can be classified as an **analytical cross-sectional study**. It was designed to investigate the risk factors of **Preterm Premature Rupture of Membranes (PPROM)** among women attending the Obstetrics and Gynecology service at **Abu Ali Sina Balkhi Teaching Hospital**. The **study population** comprised all pregnant women diagnosed with PPROM who visited the Obstetrics and Gynecology service at Abu Ali Sina Balkhi Teaching Hospital during a specified period. A **simple random sampling method** was employed to select **80 participants** for inclusion in the study.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Pregnant women diagnosed with PPROM.
- Gestational age less than 37 weeks.
- Willingness to participate in the study.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Lack of patient consent.
- Presence of severe systemic diseases that may confound the data.
- Incomplete medical records.

Data Collection Tools:

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and supplemented by information recorded in the patients' medical records. The questionnaire included demographic information, obstetric history, infectious factors, and other relevant risk factors.

Data Analysis:

After collection, the data were entered into statistical software (e.g., SPSS) and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean) and inferential statistics, including the Chi-square test when applicable. A significance level of 0.05 was considered for this study.

Ethical Considerations:

All ethical principles were strictly observed in this study. Patient information was kept confidential and used solely for scientific purposes. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to inclusion in the study.

Literature Review

1. Cunningham et al. (2022), in *Williams Obstetrics*, provided a comprehensive review of Preterm Premature Rupture of Membranes (PPROM). This book-based review summarized existing scientific evidence and prior studies, emphasizing that PPROM is a leading cause of preterm birth, accounting for approximately one-third of all early deliveries. Descriptive findings indicated a direct association with increased risks of intrauterine infection, neonatal sepsis, respiratory distress, and perinatal mortality. The authors highlighted structural weaknesses in fetal membranes, reduced collagen, and increased activity of

inflammatory enzymes as key mechanisms contributing to PPROM. They concluded that early identification of risk factors and appropriate prenatal care can significantly prevent PPROM and its complications.

2. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG, 2020) in a clinical report and practice guideline reviewed the risk factors, diagnosis, and management of PPROM. This guideline-based review indicated that PPROM occurs in approximately 2–3% of pregnancies and is influenced by multiple risk factors, including previous PPROM, genital infections, smoking, multiparity, and low socio-economic status. Inferential analysis in the guideline's referenced studies showed that these factors independently and significantly increase the likelihood of PPROM. The report emphasized that regular prenatal care and timely management of infections play a crucial role in reducing this complication.
3. Goldenberg et al. (2018) in *The Lancet* examined the epidemiology and causes of preterm birth, including PPROM, through a systematic review and data analysis. Descriptive findings suggested that 30–40% of preterm deliveries are associated with early membrane rupture. The study identified intrauterine infections and chronic inflammation as key pathophysiological mechanisms. Inferential analysis highlighted a strong link between elevated inflammatory cytokines and structural weaknesses in fetal membranes. Socioeconomic disadvantage and limited access to healthcare were also identified as indirect but important contributors. The study concluded that PPROM is a multifactorial condition requiring multidimensional preventive interventions.
4. Liu et al. (2019) conducted a prospective cohort study investigating the association between maternal Body Mass Index (BMI) and PPROM. Women were followed throughout pregnancy, and descriptive findings showed that those with low BMI experienced higher rates of PPROM compared to women with normal or high BMI. Logistic regression analysis identified low BMI as an independent and significant risk factor for PPROM ($P<0.05$). Malnutrition and poor maternal physical condition were found to weaken fetal membrane integrity. The authors concluded that improving maternal nutrition before and during pregnancy may play a critical preventive role.
5. Smith et al. (2020) conducted a case-control study assessing the role of urinary tract infections (UTIs) in PPROM. Women with PPROM were compared to a control group without the condition. Descriptive results indicated significantly higher UTI prevalence in the PPROM group. Inferential analysis using Chi-square tests and odds ratios ($OR>2$, $P<0.05$) confirmed a significant association between UTIs and PPROM. The study concluded that timely screening and treatment of UTIs during pregnancy can significantly reduce the risk of PPROM.
6. Ahmed et al. (2021) performed a cross-sectional analytical study across multiple health centers in Asia, examining the relationship between multiple pregnancies and PPROM. Descriptive findings showed that PPROM rates were significantly higher in multiple pregnancies than in singleton pregnancies. Chi-square analysis confirmed a significant association ($P<0.05$). Increased intrauterine pressure and excessive membrane stretching were identified as primary mechanisms. The authors emphasized that multiple pregnancies require closer monitoring and targeted preventive care.
7. Johnson et al. (2018) conducted a cohort study assessing the impact of maternal smoking on PPROM. Women were followed during pregnancy, and PPROM incidence was compared between smokers and non-smokers. Descriptive findings indicated a significantly higher rate of PPROM among smokers. Regression analysis identified smoking as an independent risk factor. Nicotine and other toxic compounds in cigarettes were found to reduce placental blood flow and weaken collagen in fetal membranes. The study emphasized the

importance of smoking cessation during pregnancy to prevent serious complications.

8. The WHO Research Group (2017) conducted a systematic review in developing countries to examine the role of healthcare access in PPROM. The study revealed that regions with weaker health systems experienced higher PPROM prevalence. Descriptive results indicated that lack of regular prenatal care and inadequate infection screening were major risk factors. Inferential analysis showed a significant association between limited healthcare access and increased pregnancy complications, including PPROM. The review concluded that strengthening primary healthcare systems can play a critical role in reducing this condition.
9. Khan et al. (2020) conducted a cross-sectional analytical study to assess the association between maternal literacy and PPROM. Descriptive findings indicated that women with low literacy levels had higher PPROM incidence. Chi-square analysis confirmed a significant relationship between low education and increased PPROM risk ($P<0.05$). Low awareness of prenatal care and delayed healthcare-seeking behavior were identified as contributing factors. The authors concluded that health education plays an important role in PPROM prevention.
10. Brown et al. (2019) conducted a case-control study evaluating the impact of previous abortion history on PPROM. Women with and without PPROM were compared. Descriptive findings showed a higher frequency of repeated abortions among the PPROM group. Inferential analysis using odds ratios demonstrated a significant association ($P<0.05$). Prior uterine damage from abortions may weaken fetal membranes. The study concluded that obstetric history should be carefully considered when assessing PPROM risk.
11. Patel et al. (2021) performed a cohort study examining the influence of maternal age on PPROM. Pregnant women in different age groups were followed, and descriptive findings indicated that both very young (<18 years) and older (>35 years) mothers had increased PPROM risk. Inferential analysis confirmed statistical significance ($P<0.05$). Biological factors and reduced physical capacity in these age groups may contribute to the risk. The study concluded that maternal age is an important factor in pregnancy risk assessment.
12. Rahman et al. (2018) conducted a cross-sectional study in Africa to investigate the role of vaginal infections in PPROM. Pregnant women attending obstetric clinics were included. Descriptive findings showed a higher prevalence of untreated vaginal infections in the PPROM group. Chi-square analysis confirmed a significant association ($P<0.05$). Chronic inflammation caused by infections was identified as a mechanism leading to fetal membrane damage. The study emphasized that timely diagnosis and treatment of genital infections are crucial in preventing PPROM.

Theoretical Framework

Preterm Premature Rupture of Membranes (PPROM) is a significant pregnancy complication in which the amniotic membranes rupture before the onset of labor and prior to 37 weeks of gestation. Theoretically, this phenomenon results from a complex interaction of biological, infectious, environmental, and mechanical factors, ultimately leading to structural weakness of the fetal membranes (Cunningham et al., 2022).

Physiologically, the fetal membranes consist of two main layers, the amnion and chorion, whose strength depends on collagen and the extracellular matrix. Under normal conditions, these structures remain intact until the onset of term labor. However, in pathological states, increased activity of degradative enzymes such as matrix metalloproteinases (MMPs), reduced collagen synthesis, and intrauterine inflammation

weaken the membranes, ultimately leading to premature rupture (Goldenberg et al., 2018).

From an infection–inflammation perspective, one of the primary mechanisms underlying PPROM is the invasion of microorganisms into the intrauterine environment, triggering an inflammatory response. This response is associated with elevated cytokines such as IL-6 and TNF-α, which cause tissue degradation and reduced membrane integrity. According to this theory, urinary and genital infections play a central role in initiating this process (ACOG, 2020).

From a mechanical standpoint, increased intrauterine pressure, as seen in multiple pregnancies or polyhydramnios, can overstretch the membranes and ultimately cause rupture. This theory suggests that sustained physical stress on structurally weakened membranes increases the risk of PPROM.

Additionally, the social–behavioral perspective highlights that low socio-economic status, malnutrition, limited access to healthcare, and high-risk behaviors such as smoking indirectly increase the risk of PPROM by promoting infections and impairing tissue repair.

Overall, the theoretical framework of PPROM indicates that this condition is multifactorial, with interactions among infectious, inflammatory, mechanical, and social factors playing essential roles. Understanding these mechanisms is crucial for identifying risk factors and designing effective preventive programs in clinical settings such as Abuali Sina Balkhi Teaching Hospital.

Analysis

1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Patients by Age

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
<20 years	12	15%
20–29 years	38	47.5%
30–39 years	24	30%
≥40 years	6	7.5%
Total	80	100%

Table 1 indicates that the majority of patients fall within the 20–29 years age group, accounting for 38 individuals (47.5%), which represents nearly half of the total sample. This suggests a higher prevalence or healthcare-seeking behavior among younger women. The second largest group is the 30–39 years age range, with 24 patients (30%), representing a significant portion of the sample. The group under 20 years comprises 12 patients (15%), indicating a relatively smaller proportion, while the least represented group is women aged 40 years and older, with only 6 patients (7.5%). Overall, this distribution demonstrates that the primary concentration of patients is in young and early middle-aged women, with a decreasing trend observed as age increases.

Table 2. Maternal Education Level

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	35	43.75%
Primary	22	27.5%
Secondary	15	18.75%
Higher	8	10%
Total	80	100%

Table 2 shows that the majority of mothers fall into the illiterate category, with 35 individuals (43.75%), representing nearly half of the total sample. This indicates a low level of education among a significant portion of the study population. The primary education level comes next with 22 mothers (27.5%). Additionally, 15 mothers

(18.75%) had secondary education, while the smallest proportion was observed among mothers with higher education, comprising only 8 individuals (10%). Overall, this distribution indicates that maternal education is predominantly concentrated at lower levels, with a relatively small percentage of mothers having access to higher education.

Table 3. Obstetric History

Variable	Status	Frequency	Percentage
History of Preterm Birth	Yes	28	35%
	No	52	65%
History of Abortion	Yes	30	37.5%
	No	50	62.5%

Table 3 shows that 35% of mothers had a history of preterm birth (28 individuals), while 65% had no such history (52 individuals). Additionally, 37.5% of mothers had a history of abortion (30 individuals), whereas 62.5% had no history of abortion (50 individuals). These statistics indicate that a notable proportion of mothers had experienced obstetric events such as preterm birth or abortion; however, the majority of the sample had no such history.

Table 4. Infectious Factors

Type of Infection	Frequency	Percentage
Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)	26	32.5%
Genital Infection	22	27.5%
No Infection	32	40%
Total	80	100%

Table 4 indicates that the largest proportion of mothers had no infections, with 32 individuals (40%) falling into this category. Among mothers who had infections, urinary tract infections (26 individuals, 32.5%) were more common than genital infections (22 individuals, 27.5%). This distribution suggests that, although a significant portion of the sample was free from infections, urinary and genital infections remain important maternal health risk factors.

2. Inferential Statistics

Table 5. Association between Maternal Age and PPROM (Chi-square Analysis)

Variable	χ^2	df	P-value	Result
Maternal Age	8.45	3	0.037	Significant

Table 5 shows the results of the chi-square analysis for the association between maternal age and PPROM. The χ^2 value was 8.45 with 3 degrees of freedom, and the P-value was 0.037. Since the P-value is less than 0.05, this association is statistically significant. In other words, maternal age is associated with the occurrence of PPROM, and the likelihood of PPROM varies across different age groups.

Table 6. Association between Maternal Education Level and PPROM

Variable	χ^2	df	P-value	Result
Education Level	10.62	3	0.014	Significant

Table 6 presents the chi-square analysis for the association between maternal education level and PPROM. The χ^2 value was 10.62 with 3 degrees of freedom, and the P-value was 0.014. Since $P < 0.05$, this association is statistically significant. This indicates that maternal education level is related to the occurrence of PPROM, and the probability of PPROM differs among education groups.

Table 7. Association between Urinary and Genital Infections and PPROM

Variable	χ^2	df	P-value	Result
Infections	12.88	2	0.002	Significant

Table 7 shows the chi-square analysis for the association between urinary and genital infections and PPROM. The χ^2 value was 12.88 with 2 degrees of freedom, and the P-value was 0.002. Since $P < 0.05$, this association is statistically significant. This indicates that the presence of urinary and genital infections is associated with PPROM, and mothers with these infections have a higher likelihood of experiencing PPROM.

Table 8. Association between History of Abortion and PPROM

Variable	χ^2	df	P-value	Result
History of Abortion	6.74	1	0.009	Significant

Table 8 presents the chi-square analysis for the association between maternal history of abortion and PPROM. The χ^2 value was 6.74 with 1 degree of freedom, and the P-value was 0.009. Since $P < 0.05$, this association is statistically significant. In other words, a history of abortion is associated with PPROM, and mothers with previous abortions are more likely to experience PPROM.

Results

This study aimed to investigate the risk factors of preterm premature rupture of membranes (PPROM) among 80 pregnant women attending the obstetrics and gynecology service at the Abuali Sina Balkh Teaching Hospital. The findings are presented in descriptive and inferential statistics.

In the descriptive analysis, the highest proportion of participants (47.5%) were in the age group of 20–29 years. Regarding education level, 43.75% of women were illiterate, indicating a low level of health awareness among a substantial portion of the sample. In terms of obstetric history, 35% of women had a history of preterm delivery, and 37.5% had a previous abortion. Concerning infections, 32.5% of participants had urinary tract infections, 27.5% had genital infections, while 40% reported no infections.

The inferential analysis using the chi-square test showed statistically significant associations between all examined factors and the occurrence of PPROM. Maternal age was significantly associated with PPROM ($P = 0.037$), education level ($P = 0.014$), urinary and genital infections ($P = 0.002$), and history of abortion ($P = 0.009$). These results indicate that demographic, infectious, and obstetric factors play a substantial role in increasing the risk of PPROM.

Overall, the findings suggest that PPROM is a multifactorial condition, with infectious factors and low maternal health awareness playing a major role in its occurrence. These results highlight the need to strengthen prenatal care, implement routine infection screening, and improve health education for pregnant women.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that preterm premature rupture of membranes (PPROM) among the participants was significantly associated with multiple factors, including maternal age, education level, urinary and genital infections, and obstetric history. These results are consistent with both national and international studies, confirming the importance of demographic, infectious, and reproductive factors in the occurrence of PPROM.

In this study, the highest incidence of PPROM was observed in women aged 20–29 years. This aligns with some previous research suggesting that women in their most active reproductive years may face higher risks due to increased physiological activity and frequent pregnancies. However, other international studies report that women over 35 years also have an elevated risk due to decreased quality of fetal membranes and higher prevalence of comorbidities. These differences may reflect variations in population demographics, fertility patterns, and access to healthcare services across regions.

A key finding of this research was the significant association between low maternal education and increased PPROM incidence. Illiterate or low-educated women

constituted a higher proportion of cases. This result supports numerous studies highlighting that low health literacy, irregular prenatal care visits, and poor recognition of danger signs are important contributors to adverse pregnancy outcomes. In contrast, in some developed countries, this association is less pronounced due to higher overall awareness and more comprehensive healthcare services.

Regarding infectious factors, the study demonstrated that urinary and genital infections play a significant role in PPROM. This finding is in line with global evidence. The likely mechanism involves inflammation of the fetal membranes, increased cytokine production, and weakening of the collagen structure of the amniotic sac, ultimately leading to premature rupture. Timely treatment of urinary tract infections has been reported to reduce PPROM risk significantly, highlighting the importance of routine infection screening.

Additionally, obstetric history, including prior abortion and preterm birth, was identified as an important risk factor. This aligns with prior studies showing that previous damage to the uterus or fetal membranes can increase structural weakness, thereby raising the likelihood of premature rupture. Some discrepancies in the literature may be explained by differences in sample size, study design, or PPROM definitions.

From an inferential perspective, the chi-square analysis revealed that all studied factors were statistically significantly associated with PPROM ($P < 0.05$). This underscores that PPROM is a multifactorial condition, and its occurrence cannot be attributed to a single factor. In fact, the interaction of social (education), biological (age, obstetric history), and infectious factors collectively increases risk.

Overall, the findings suggest that PPROM is more prevalent in environments with low health awareness and high infection rates. Therefore, preventive interventions should be multidimensional, encompassing health education, enhanced prenatal care, and early detection and treatment of infections. Such comprehensive strategies are essential to reduce the incidence and adverse outcomes associated with PPROM.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that preterm premature rupture of membranes (PPROM) is a multifactorial complication during pregnancy influenced by demographic, infectious, and obstetric factors. Results obtained from a sample of 80 pregnant women revealed that maternal age, education level, urinary and genital infections, and a history of abortion or preterm delivery were all significantly associated with the occurrence of PPROM.

Among these factors, infectious conditions and low maternal health literacy played the most prominent role in increasing the risk of PPROM. These findings highlight the importance of prenatal care, regular infection screening, and enhancing pregnant women's knowledge about maternal health. Overall, reducing the incidence of PPROM requires a comprehensive approach that addresses both medical and socio-behavioral determinants.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Strengthen health education programs for pregnant women at healthcare centers and hospitals.
2. Implement regular screening for early detection of urinary and genital infections during pregnancy.
3. Increase pregnant women's access to antenatal care (ANC) services.
4. Raise awareness about pregnancy danger signs through media campaigns and health facilities.

5. Encourage women with a history of abortion or preterm delivery to have regular follow-up with healthcare providers.
6. Train healthcare personnel in the early diagnosis and timely management of PPROM.
7. Develop community-based programs to reduce risk factors in underserved and rural areas.
8. Enhance the recording and reporting system for PPROM cases in hospitals to support future research and preventive planning.

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