



An overview of midwifery education and services in Bangladesh



Directorate General of Nursing and Midwifery

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

Background

Maternal and newborn including adolescent health are the priority areas in Bangladesh. The introduction of professional midwives as per International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) standards who are autonomous for the care of healthy women and newborns, and consult and refer as needed for the care of complications, is an important step in increasing the health of mothers and newborns. To achieve the MDGs target, the Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina committed to the United Nations General Assembly in 2010 during the “Every Woman Every Child Initiative”, 3000 midwives post has been created in the public sector. Global standards for midwifery education has been introduced in Bangladesh both a six month post basic advanced midwifery course for existing nurses in 2010 and a three year direct entry education programme for registered midwives.

New cadre of professional midwives in Bangladesh

A three-year Diploma in Midwifery course started in 2013 January 2013 with an intake of 525 students in 20 nursing educational institutes and colleges. Currently 41 existing public and 41 private nursing and midwifery institutions have midwifery programmes including BRAC University with an annual intake of 1050 and intakes in Govt. and private institutions respectively.

The total number of 6 month post basic midwives is 1600. Among them 1200 have been deployed as a midwife in public health facilities at Upazilla Health Complexes and below, some of them are working as functional midwives in districts and medical college hospitals where currently there are no midwifery posts.

The total number of three year Diploma Registered Midwives is 4396 (BNMC, July 2020). The Directorate General of Nursing and Midwifery under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare is responsible for producing the qualified and competent midwives. With a vision to fulfill the current demand 3000 midwifery posts have been created. Currently, 1149 registered midwives have been deployed to 342 Upazilla Health Complexes around the country. Midwives provide services in Upazilla Health Complexes 24 hours 7 days a week. Qualified and competent Midwives ensure woman's right of safe motherhood by saving the lives of mothers and newborns.

Currently a number of registered midwives have been deployed by the UNFPA in the humanitarian crisis areas as Cyclone affected, Rohingya influx and tea garden to provide a wide range of Sexual and Reproductive Health Services, including antenatal care, safe deliveries, emergency obstetric care, family planning and clinical management of rape. Besides this, Directorate General Nursing and Midwifery has been provided training on minimum initial service package for reproductive health in crisis situations and on job training to the midwives to increase the competencies and skills to provide quality care to the women and newborns. These midwives will truly make a difference in saving the lives of mothers and their babies and who can provide more than 87% of all reproductive health services. UNFPA is supporting the Government of Bangladesh to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate the Midwifery programmes. The Global Affairs of Canada, DFID and Sweden are providing excellent supports through UNFPA to the Bangladesh Government to strengthen the midwifery in Bangladesh to ensure quality of midwifery services.

Midwifery faculty development

One of the biggest challenges on introduction of professional midwifery education is dedicated midwifery faculty. In response to the midwifery faculty development, a 28 day Training of Trainers (TOT) is ongoing and blended web-based master program on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) with the technical support from Dalarna University, Sweden is introduced. Total 90 nurse midwives have been completed Master degree on SRHR and 30 will be completed in 2020. This online program's development and implementation is the joint success of MOHFW, DGNM, UNFPA and Dalarna University.

Teaching learning aids for midwifery education:

All 38 public institutions have received minimum package for midwifery education including midwifery books & kit boxes, Mamanatalie, Neonatale, birthing balls and tools and many other teaching learning equipment to ensure quality midwifery education.

Midwifery Internships

UNFPA is supporting the DGNM to conduct mentorships for newly graduated midwives who are waiting for deployment. Weaknesses in the clinical teaching have been identified and in response a three month internship at the rural hospital level where midwives will be deployed is being

conducted annually. In addition a one month competency based training on SRH including MR and family planning are filling gaps in the existing curriculum.

Development of policy guidelines & tools

To facilitate the midwifery education and services, a number of guidelines and tools have been developed initiated by the Directorate General of Nursing and Midwifery with technical support of UNFPA such as Strategic Direction, Training of Teachers guideline (ToT), Standard Operating procedure (SOP), Job description, Midwife led care model, National Midwifery Policy guideline, Accreditation guideline for midwives and nurses, log book for midwifery clinical practices, Deployment policy, Mentor/ preceptor ship training modules for the faculty and clinical midwives on evidence based midwifery services.

Regulatory support

Bangladesh Nursing and Midwifery Council (BNMC) as regulatory is working closely with the MoH&FW and DGNM to manage nursing and midwifery education and services. The council provides license for practicing midwives in Bangladesh. A number of guidelines, tools including curricula have been developed and introduced under the BNMC with the technical support of UNFPA as the guidelines for the Licensing and relicensing exam, Midwifery code of ethics as a safe guard for the people and midwives, Nursing and midwifery act which has approved in December 2016 and developed bylaws. To ensure the quality of midwifery education around the country, BNMC has developed guideline on standardization of midwifery examination system and developed accreditation guideline and assessment tools to assess the ability/capacity of each midwifery institution to run the international standard midwifery programme. A supportive supervision mechanism is has been developed to support the midwifery faculty and students. To improve the quality of midwifery education and create an opportunity for the higher education of future midwives, BNMC are working on reviewing Diploma in midwifery curriculum, developed BSc in midwifery curriculum, and drafted a proposal to introduce MSc in midwifery. BNMC also have been doing advocacy for the midwifery profession as Celebration of International Day of Midwife (IDM) with the Theme of “Midwives leading the way with quality care”.

Introduced midwifery led care model

Strengthening the National Midwifery Program (SNMP) through Save the Children International (SCI) is supporting the Government to implement midwifery led continuum of care through

facility mentorship at public health facilities supported by UNFPA. The main focused areas are; strengthening clinical training opportunities for student midwives, ensuring quality of evidence based clinical care by midwives at the work place, and creating an enabling environment by advocating with stakeholders for establishing midwifery led care model (MLC). SCI is currently providing technical support in 38 Districts and Medical College Hospitals, 38 nursing institutions with midwifery education and 62 Upazila Health Complexes (UHCs). A wide range of advocacy programme for the medical and nursing professionals is ongoing under the Directorate General of Nursing and Midwifery, Directorate general of Health Services and Directorate general of Family Planning.

Professional body

The Bangladesh Midwifery Society (BMS) was founded in August 2010 as a professional midwives' Society in Bangladesh with the aim to provide support and advocate for this young profession. BMS is a member of the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM). BMS works closely with Government, national and international organizations, and other professional bodies. The responsibilities of BMS is to ensure the right of all women to access professional midwifery care, promote research, develop midwifery services, establish evidence-based practices to reduce maternal and newborn mortality.

Online Midwifery education during Covid-19

Since March 2020 all educational institutions in the country including midwifery are closed due to COVID- 19 pandemic. As it was uncertain to reopen the institution, DGNM and BNMC were agreed to start the remote education through using social media specifically face book, messenger, Skype and zoom link to continue support the students to study at home. The objectives of this remote education are to engage students to continue their education, create an opportunity for students and teachers to interact online and continue teach subjects in the curriculum. To make it happen successfully the DGNM and BNMC were arranged a virtual orientation meeting on the model of remote education for all the midwifery faculties of public institutions.

Midwifery Services in Bangladesh during COVID pandemic

In the COVID pandemic situation midwives are working as front fighter of health sector and continuously offering midwifery care to provide comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care in this critical moment to save mother and newborns life. With the support of UNFPA, DGNM has procured and distributed Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and other safety measures among midwives who are working at the UHCs and USCs.

Challenges and way forward:

Although there have been great achievement for midwifery education and services, there are still gaps which include insufficient numbers of midwives, inadequate posts for midwives and gaps in quality education as midwifery faculty are not yet midwives and proper supervision and clinical preceptorship support for students. The conducive environment for midwifery services need to be ensured.