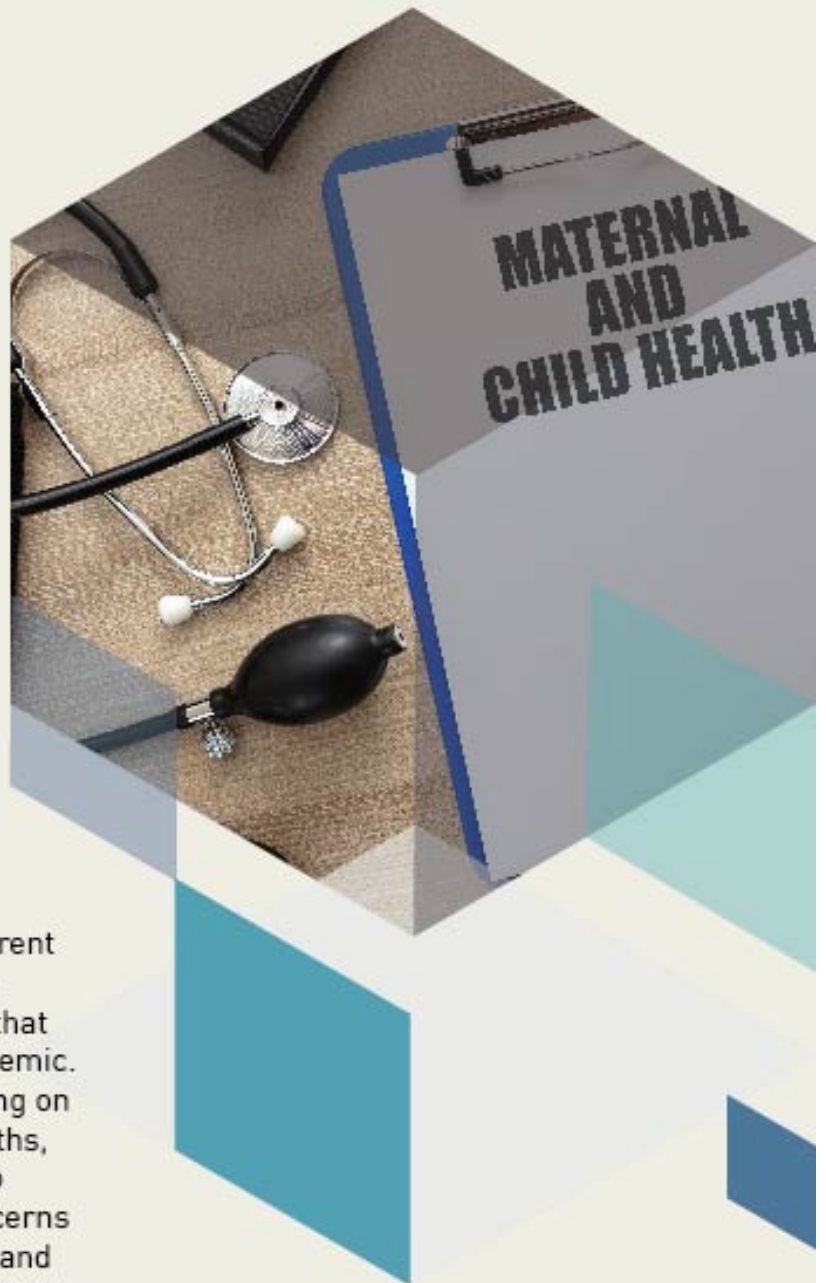


IMPACTS CONSEQUENCES AND RESPONSES TO COVID-19 IN BANGLADESH : A HUMAN SECURITY APPROACH



Background

The pandemic is worsening the current gaps which highlight social, health, political, and economic disparities that exacerbate the impacts of the pandemic. In Bangladesh, the lockdown starting on 26 March and lasting over two months, during which people were unable to continue working which raises concerns about economic stability, maternal and child health, mental health and intimate partner abuse.



“ THE IMPACT OF THE
PANDEMIC ON
MATERNAL AND CHILD
HEALTH

Speaker:
Professor, Ahmed Hossain
Public Health and Director
Global Health Institute
North South University



North South University



SPG
South Asian Institute of Policy
and Governance

Email: cps@northsouth.edu

THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH



Challenges

- From health to economy, safety to social protection, throughout every sphere the impacts of COVID-19 on women and girls are only exacerbated by virtue of their sex.
- Over 60% of women in Bangladesh have reported some form of intimate partner abuse which is more prevalent if the partner experiences food insecurity. Precipitating factors can include work- and income-loss stress, which can cause anxiety and depression increase among men.
- The government of Bangladesh planned to organize a "measles and rubella campaign" targeting around 34 million children in 2020, but the current situation has postponed this program.
 - In April, routine immunization activities were substantially decreased by 70% compared to the previous year.
 - Sporadic outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases, including measles and diphtheria, occurred in parts of Bangladesh during the pandemic.
- In 2020 about a million children under one year of age, live in the country and had some disturbance to the immunization program due to limited access to health centers, low availability of PPE for healthcare workers and fear of contracting COVID-19.
- Access to the nutritional service has been experiencing drastic consequences owing to COVID-19. Additionally, there might be a chance of a downtrend in breastfeeding and an upward trend in using infant formula. Evidence suggests, 73% of nutritional facilities that offer treatments for severe acute malnutrition (SAM) have become non-operational during the lockdown period.
- Among the operational units, only 2% have been deemed as fully functional. The healthcare disruptions caused by COVID-19 could have a devastating impact on child mortality.
- A declining trend has been observed in using family planning and information services, as well as sexual and reproductive health more broadly. Despite this disruption, the need for family planning remains the same. The stay-at-home scenarios may result in unplanned pregnancy, which will add a significant burden to the health system.
- The parents from low-income families tend to marry their daughters at an early age to reduce the number of mouths to feed, which increased during this pandemic. Yet, early marriages typically double the burden. If marriage problems arise, parents of the girl are often asked to take responsibility. The topic of child marriage has been chosen as a means of depriving girls of their fundamental rights to health and of the ability to achieve their full potential by reinforcing current poverty and inequality and a vicious cycle of violence. And the long-term closure of the school brings a serious burden to this problem.

THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH



Recommendations

- People in Bangladesh are being encouraged to take precautions to prevent transmission by staying at home and physical distancing. However, another disease and its impact are not eliminated with a pandemic. While several programs, including some health services, are reduced, the risk of more infectious disease outbreaks continues to increase. Preparation and disease responses should therefore be taken.
- Women should be involved in economic efforts at the heart of health recovery. The full and equally capable women's potential with men promotes sustainable, balanced, inclusive growth, improves women's representation in institutions and results for intergenerational development and also reduces the crisis.
- We should initiate a nationwide immunization program immediately to close childhood vaccination gaps. Innovative strategies such as mobile vaccine centres, vaccine control and vaccination in schools and in homes could help to reduce the gap. As a result, mobile teams will visit neighborhoods and bring children to attend care centers and hospitals. In high-risk populations, health workers have gone door-to-door and boat-to-boat to administer life-saving vaccines to the most vulnerable.
- As health systems move to COVID-19 prevention and care, ensuring family planning services is essential for the government in Bangladesh.
- In order to improve the health of women and children, psychosocial support services are required. The effects of support are also shown to benefit not only one woman, but also other women and families. This is where the power of the psychosocial support for women manifests.
- The government should use a systematic approach to recognize and resolve the root causes of the negative practice of child marriage in order to discourage marriage below 18 years of age, and to identify opportunities for improvement. The government should include children, youth and parents, community leaders to identify, understand and end such harmful practices.
- Above all four things should be continued till the pandemic ends: education (e.g., using masks, avoiding gatherings, maintaining hygiene, etc.); surveillance; stepped care approaches; and improving social and economic conditions.